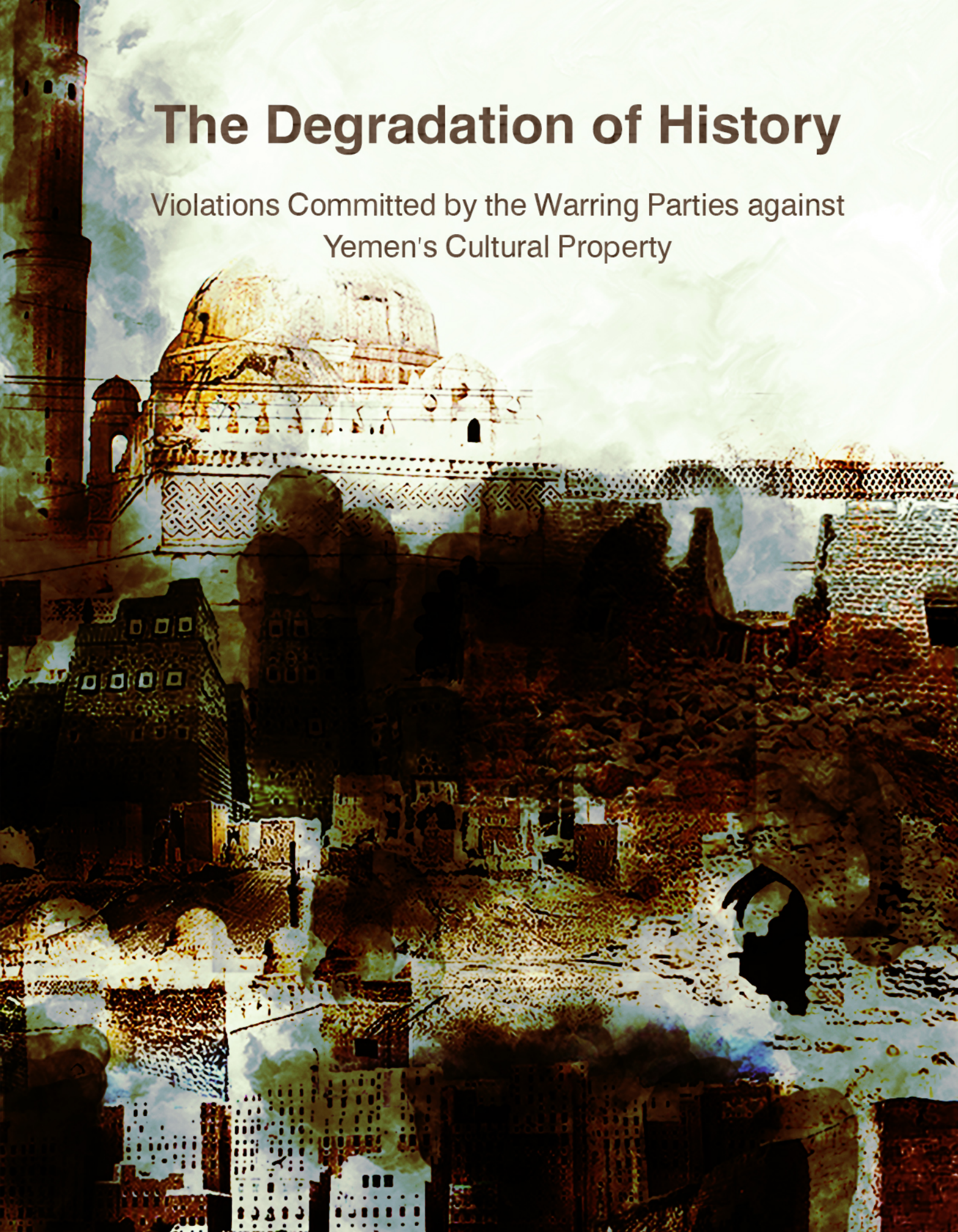


# The Degradation of History

Violations Committed by the Warring Parties against  
Yemen's Cultural Property

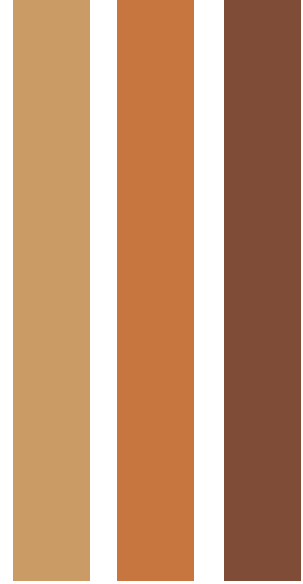


November 2018-Yemen  
[www.mwatana.org](http://www.mwatana.org)



Mwatana for Human Rights





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against Yemen's Cultural Property

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The background is a collage of historical architectural images. At the top, a large, light-colored domed building with intricate carvings is visible. To the left, a tall, slender minaret rises. The bottom of the collage features a dark, textured area with a white rectangular box containing the text 'Historical Background'. Below this box, there are more architectural details, including a series of small, square windows and a dark, arched structure. The overall color palette is warm, with shades of brown, orange, and yellow, giving it an aged, historical feel.

# **Historical Background**

Yemen is the cradle of one of the oldest civilizations known to man in the Middle East. Historical sources indicate that the science of history of the Arabian Peninsula was prominent in the south<sup>(1)</sup>. This civilization relied on trade, mining, agriculture and urbanization, which enabled it to create a stable society that recorded this development and transferred its accumulated experience through history. A portion of this experience has been transferred out of Yemen, at varying intervals, with humans migrating north.<sup>(2)</sup>

Given the climate of Yemen, which is directly linked to the influence of the monsoon, agriculture flourished in this country, and its inhabitants developed effective irrigation methods such as canals and dams. This agricultural prosperity had a direct impact on the social relations that created a system of intangible heritage associated with rituals of worship, irrigation and harvesting.

The work in the field imposed a wider participation of women<sup>(3)</sup> outside their households, along with the men. As evidenced by monuments and inscriptions, the old and stable Yemen gave a great deal of space to the participation of women in the public sphere, culminating in the assumption of power by women. On the other hand, the synergy between the geographical location and the global trade movement turned Yemen into a point of contact between Egypt, the South Seas and India<sup>(4)</sup>. This was a major reason for why Yemen became the target of ambitious and greedy international interests, as it was a privileged country during a certain period of its history<sup>(5)</sup>. During that period, the country was dominated by wealthy classes that were interested in building palaces and castles<sup>(6)</sup>.

Not only did this development attract colonizers to Yemen, but it also represented a turning point, since it allowed the Yemenis, along with many other things, to document Yemen's old history, with its legal and political traditions to resolve disputes among themselves<sup>(7)</sup>, the establishment of successive states, the union and the division between the old provinces<sup>(8)</sup>. Many remaining artifacts and sites still exist and constitute a vivid witness to the boom and prosperity of old Yemen. However, most historical sources agree that numerous artifacts and archeological sites in Yemen remain "buried under dust and

(1) Sayyed, Ayman, Sources of the History of Yemen in the Islamic Period, French Institute for Oriental Archaeology, 1974, vol. 7, p. 3

(2) "Al Petra" was one of Yemen's trade centers: Ibrahim, Mirna, The Story and History of Arab Civilizations, Editio Creps, INT 1998-1999 p: 7

(3) It seems that the contribution of women, working alongside men in the fields of production in the old agricultural societies, especially in the early stages, was more prevailing than in other societies, which entailed a higher quantity and quality of rights and obligations for women, compared to other old societies: Saleh, Abdel Aziz, Women in Ancient Arabic Texts and Antiquities, Kuwait University, 1985, E. 1, p. 69

(4) Al Barihi, Ibrahim, Crafts and Industries in the Shadow of the Southern Musnad (South Arabian script), Saudi Ministry of Education, 2000, E. 1, p. 19

(5) The Greek Fa'arnastanis (195 BC) describes Yemen as "the richest country in the world": The Story and History of Arab Civilizations, op. Cit., P. 35

(6) Historical sources showcase that architecture flourished in the first millennium BC, and this architectural form has been inherited from then until the present: The Story and History of Arab Civilizations, op. Cit., P. 35

(7) There are laws relating to disputes over land and watering. To learn more: Crafts and Industries in the Shadow of the Southern Musnad (South Arabian script), op. cit., P. 102

(8) To cite one example, we find the inscription "Federal painting", which was discovered in the region of Al-Jawf, and on its basis, a union between the kingdoms of Ma'in and Sheba happened: the Story and History of Arab Civilizations, op. cit., P. 30



sand”<sup>(9)</sup>.

The medieval history of Yemen was equally rich; and it was the period during which Islam and, later on, multiple denominations, spread in the country. During that period, “history” was written with more awareness, particularly with the adoption of the Arabic language, as an official language for writing. The manuscripts preserved in the country’s libraries carried many of the teachings of Islam. The libraries of the Grand Mosque of Sana’a, the National Museum of Taiz, the Library of Zabid and the library of the city of Jibla have kept a substantial number of these manuscripts.

These “relics” recorded a number of important moments in the history of Yemen, including the ascension of Queen Arwa bint Ahmed al-Sulayhi (473-532 AH/1080-1138 AD) to the throne. The Queen has been given titles such as “Lady” and “Free”, and Queen Arwa is still known by these attributes to the present. Her reign is greatly revered by the Yemenis because it led to long-standing political traditions<sup>(10)</sup>, ensuing development<sup>(11)</sup> and clear interest in infrastructure<sup>(12)</sup>.

In addition to the accumulated artifacts during this period, the Islamic State created various types of religious buildings<sup>(13)</sup>, schools (madrassas)<sup>(14)</sup>, shrines, temples, tekyyehs, fortresses, samars, baths and castles that characterized - in their different architectures - the state. Although the multiplicity of Islamic states, their continued conflict with each other, and external interference in the affairs of the country have had a significant impact on the destruction of some historical monuments, their influence is also reflected in the

(9) “I ask the League of Arab States and the Arab States ... to send specialized archeological missions specializing in ancient monuments, dialects and languages to the archeological sites in Yemen, the rest of southern Arabia and other locations of the Arabian Peninsula to start archeological digs and explore the history of the island under the soil and sand, and publish the findings in a scientific publication”. Dr. Jawad Ali, expert in the history of the Arabs before Islam - Part I, second edition, p. 9

(10) Historical sources indicate that it was the first experiment in the federal government, after the country was divided into provinces and cities, and it was governed by a meticulous decentralized administrative system, with the separation between religion and state affairs: Al Mursi, Hayat, the role of the free lady Arwa bint Ahmed al-Sulayhi in Yemen, King Abdul Aziz University, 79/1980, on Hamdani, al-Sulayhioun, p. 181

(11) The Queen relied on the nationalization of a large area of land, and took advantage of it by exchanging its crop in order to purchase livestock, and using a part of it as fertile and grazing lands: Al-Haddad, Yahya, Yemen's Political History, p. 212. Amer Tamer: Arwa Queen of Yemen, p. 151.

(12) “The visitor to the city of Jibla sees the bridges that connect the two banks of the valleys and the highly sophisticated and complex irrigation channels, which were built from Jibla to Jund, the Mosque and the Queen's School, and the remains of the Palace of Ezz, in addition to other projects that include paving the road from Samara to Al-Siyani Region”: The Political History of Yemen, op. Cit., p. 212.

(13) The author of the Introduction to the Islamic architecture and art in Yemen points out that sources agree that the great mosque in Sana’a was established during the life of the Prophet Mohammad, and it was modified in different periods. The same is true of the Jennad Mosque in Taiz, but it was destroyed more than once. The Great Mosque in Kawkaban was built during the reign of the Yufirid State, and the Great Mosque of Zabid dates back to the third century AH and rose to prominence in the era of the Ziyadid dynasty. The Dhamar Mosque was built after the Great Mosque in Sana’a and before the construction of the Jennad Mosque. As for the great mosque, it was built in the beginning of the fifth century AH, during the era of Hussein bin Salama: Shiha, Mustafa, Introduction to architecture and art in Yemen, I, 1987.

(14) Al-Amiriya Madrassa (school) in Rada was built in the year 910 AH/1504 AD, during the reign of Amir bin Abd al-Wahhab, one of the most prominent sultans of the Tahirid dynasty. The Al-Ashrafiya Madrassa in Taiz was built by Sultan Ashraf Ismail, the son of the king al-Afdal in the year 800 AH, and the Mudhaffar Madrassa in Taiz was built by Sultan Mudhaffar bin Umar bin Ali bin Rasul in 965 AH. The Al Maatbiya Madrassa was built by Jihat Al Tawachi Jamal Eddine Abdallah al-Ashraf, who passed away in 796 AH. The Jabartiya Madrassa was built by Sheikh Ismail Bin Abdul Samad Al Jabarty (722-806 AH) from the Rasulid Dynasty, and its architecture was renewed by Amer bin Abdul Wahab, and the Bakaria Madrassa in Sana’a was built in an Ottoman style by the Ottoman minister Hassan Pasha in 1005 AH: Introduction to Architecture and Islamic Arts in Yemen, op. cit.



diversity of Islamic art in Yemen<sup>(15)</sup>. However, those conflicts and interventions have been marked by an acute hostility towards history and diverse heritage.

Despite the cycles of political conflicts and wars that Yemen has witnessed since the dissolution of the last stable kingdom in its ancient history, and the periods of conflict in the era of the Islamic states and their aftermath, the country retained part of its tangible and intangible heritage until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yemenis preserved this heritage because of social customs that are closely associated with history. Many sources<sup>(16)</sup> attribute this to the isolation that characterized political practices in the last centuries of the second millennium, especially in the northern regions of Yemen. However, since the beginning of archaeological excavations in the mid-eighteenth century, the tangible heritage (inscriptions and antiquities) in both the southern and northern regions has been increasingly exposed to looting, theft, smuggling, destruction or distortion.

The Yemeni society also maintained a less extreme<sup>(17)</sup> culture and was more inclined to respect diversity. The economic boom associated with the trend towards oil<sup>(18)</sup> exploration, gave this culture a modern dimension. In urban societies, fashion, cinemas<sup>(19)</sup> and music<sup>(20)</sup> flourished, while the countryside (villages) preserved its identity, which was protected by the bonds of lineage and good neighborliness. It was a complete moral system, based on goodwill, on a set of values inherited through the customs that constituted the laws of ancient Yemen, in addition to the religious teachings affirmed by Islam.

The style of rural architecture reflected these ethics. Over long periods of the Yemeni history, many Yemeni villages built houses that were formed from a horizontal series of interconnected rooms. More than a family could live in a residential complex, which usually consisted of one floor. Members of these families saw each other in the common halls during their daily domestic activities. On moonlit nights, families, with their women and men, chatted in the common halls of these structures and told stories of a mythical nature.

The adopted pattern of horizontal construction was the standard feature of the popular

(15) Introduction to Architecture and Art in Yemen. Op. cit, p. 13.

(16) "Since the early years of independence, the development of Yemen (...) has been hindered by the political instability caused by external influences (...). In order to keep the regime away from outside influence, Imam (Yehya) has been practicing isolationism and this policy led to the consolidation and perpetuation of medieval systems": Authors, Collection, Contemporary History of Yemen, Madbouli Library, p. 31. = "The isolation policy adopted by the Imam (Yehya) aimed to protect the country from the penetration of colonial powers and monopolies that sought to subjugate the country to their influence. The other side of the policy of isolation was to preserve the backward socio-economic relations, and the customs and traditions inherited from the past: Elena K. Golovkaya, The Political Development of the Yemen Arab Republic, Center for Studies and Research, 1994, I, p. 369.

= "The revolution of September 1962, which ended a thousand years of the rule of the Islamic theocratic regime, symbolizes the official end of the isolation of Yemen": Yemen as Seen by Others, Taminian, Lucine, American Institute of Yemeni Studies, 1997, p. 324

(17) In Hadhramaut; reverence for the "guardians" is one of the most prominent aspects of the religious life of the inhabitants of the valley who visit their tombs with domes built over them, lively markets were animated with singing and folk dancing during visits, incense burned and vows offered: Yemen as Seen by Others, op. cit. p. 309, 310 and 313

(18) In the 1950s, attempts were made to explore Yemen's mineral wealth. Schools were opened in Sana'a where secular subjects were taught, and the government expanded its study missions abroad: The Contemporary History of Yemen, op. Cit., P: 88

(19) The author of "Yemen and the People of Yemen" (op. Cit.) speaks of the fact that Balqis cinema in Sana'a screened the first film shown in the mid-sixties, which starred the Egyptian actor Salah Mansour.

(20) Al-Bara dance was a symbol of tribal identity. However, since the mid-1970s, changes in the performance of the dance and its contents have taken place and the dance was practiced in public squares in cities instead of tribal areas: Yemen as Seen by Others, p. 327.

classes in their coexistence and bias towards each other. On the other hand, the classes that distinguished themselves, such as the sheikhs and the landowners, were keen to reflect their wealth through buildings with a vertical construction.

This social convergence allowed people to develop a culture of coexistence and openness. Cultural diversity was significantly reflected in a variety of popular clothes, songs, and events of a mystical<sup>(21)</sup> social nature. If the tangible heritage of Yemen was subjected to risks of obliteration, distortion, theft and smuggling throughout the country's political conflict, the 1970s should be seen as a critical period in terms of the dangers surrounding the intangible heritage because the developments that occurred during this period and its aftermath, were accompanied by an activity of an ideological nature that also centered on investing in the economics of oil and the techniques of scientific development. As the oil and technical boom peaked, the differences between ideological currents, including sectarian divergence between the two most prominent religious sects, Sunnis/Shiites, increased. Although the situation in Yemen took on other names: Shafi'i/Zaidism, this discrepancy eventually led to the emergence of unusual manifestations of extremism pertaining to the intangible heritage, which was characterized by coexistence and openness. This situation gradually culminated with the targeting of tangible heritage (cultural objects), whether intentionally as a result of hostility towards it, or indifference to its historical value.

After the dredging of the Yemeni identity, the current war against the remaining tangible heritage and cultural property was launched and resulted with the country losing, day after day, its diverse heritage, its traditions that were entrenched in the governance and its economic and cultural practices.

The parties to the war have been engaged in the destruction of a large number of cultural objects, whether by using them for military purposes or by causing disproportionate damage to them. Because these parties and affiliated armed groups also carry a hostile attitude toward history that is inconsistent with their ideology, many cultural properties have been destroyed in their areas of control.

Instead, the internal parties to the conflict have, on more than one occasion, concentrated on historic buildings and castles, causing considerable damage<sup>(22)</sup>. The Arab Coalition forces also raided historic cities listed on the World Heritage List<sup>(23)</sup>, archeological buildings and castles<sup>(24)</sup>, which led to their total and partial destruction.

(21) Refer to footnote number 16.

(22) A party to the conflict stationed itself in the Al-Qahirah Castle in Taiz governorate and the military museum in the city of Aden. They were used as military barracks, which caused great damage to them.

(23) The bombing of the Old City of Sana'a by the Arab Coalition Forces on May 12th, 2015 (a city listed on the World Heritage List) can be referred to in this context: [http://www.unesco.org/new/ar/culture/themes/dynamic-content-single-view/news/unesco\\_director\\_general\\_calls\\_on\\_all\\_parties\\_to\\_protect\\_yeme/](http://www.unesco.org/new/ar/culture/themes/dynamic-content-single-view/news/unesco_director_general_calls_on_all_parties_to_protect_yeme/). The wall surrounding the city of Shibam Kawkaban was also destroyed by a coalition air strike on February 14th, 2016. An archaeological mosque in the Bani Matar area was extensively damaged following an air strike on August 25th, 2016: [http://www.unesco.org/new/ar/social-and-human-sciences/themes/sv/news/unesco\\_director\\_general\\_condemns\\_the\\_destruction\\_of\\_the\\_9th/](http://www.unesco.org/new/ar/social-and-human-sciences/themes/sv/news/unesco_director_general_condemns_the_destruction_of_the_9th/)

(24) Arab coalition fighters destroyed the presidential palace in Tahrir Square in Sana'a, which was a building with an authentic Yemeni style.



# **Lack of Accountability**



The perception that the destruction of cultural heritage and property is an insignificant behavior encouraged the parties to the conflict to commit further violations. With the state of idleness in identity, the parties to the conflict have deepened their hostile view of a history that is incompatible with their ideology and thus destroyed the heritage in which they see a threat to their existence. However, these parties would not have committed any violation of cultural property unless they were certain that they were immune to accountability and punishment.

In this regard, we wish to confirm that heritage is a crucible of cultural diversity and a factor that ensures sustainable development<sup>(25)</sup>. Considering that heritage is a common human path, and that Yemen is a signatory to many conventions to safeguard its heritage, it is the responsibility of the international community to contribute to the protection of this heritage, in addition to the responsibility that the authorities and society must assume in the protection of their cultural and historical heritage and property.

In times of conflict, cultural property may be exceptionally included on the “enhanced protection” list adopted by the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention elaborated in 1999. It is therefore necessary for the international community to include the heritage of Yemen on the list and to prevent attacks against it or prevent using it for military purposes<sup>(26)</sup>.

Pointing to the violators or those backing them may make these parties reluctant to act with aggression or indifference in regard to Yemen's heritage and cultural property. It is useful to remind these parties of the responsibilities they must undertake to protect the heritage and the sanctions that await them in the event of disavowal of these responsibilities<sup>(27)</sup>.

The prosecution of responsible people<sup>(28)</sup> convicted of the destruction of cultural property in Africa has set a good example of good endeavors for the protection of the world's human heritage and how the world, if it has the will, will send its deterring messages to all those who have set themselves up as enemies of history.

In the end, efforts should be relied upon in order to stop the war and start a serious dialogue to get Yemen out of its predicament. As the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate and the political stalemate remains, belligerents gamble with the country that was once a single entity and, in three years of war, has almost faded away.

(25) According to UNESCO's Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore, 1989.

(26) Refer to the Humanitarian Journal of the International Red Cross, Issue 47, Winter 2009/2010, Enhanced Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, Dr. Mohamed Sameh Amro.

(27) The Hague Convention (1954) and its second Protocol emphasize that the provisions of individual criminal responsibility are not excluded, since it is considered that the intentional commission of any of the acts set forth in the Protocol constitutes a crime, namely the targeting of cultural property or property included in the enhanced protection, by attacking or using it or its immediate surroundings, in support of military action, widespread destruction or seizure; or the commission of theft, looting, embezzlement or vandalism.

(28) The person accused of destroying Timbuktu's monuments in Mali is appearing before the International Criminal Court, website: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/mali/al-mahdi>





# **Concepts and Definitions**

## ■ Cultural Property

Most international law instruments as well as some national legislation have used the concept of “cultural property” to refer to movable and immovable property, which are of great importance to the cultural heritage of peoples. If the term “property” refers to all objects that are traded in order to meet the needs of humans, the term “cultural” defines the social and historical context of these properties<sup>(29)</sup>.

Considering the texts of international conventions that define the concept of cultural property, we found that the most acceptable and common definition, in light of the international law, is derived from two sources:

- **First Source:** Article 1 of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (1954), which contains three sub-paragraphs:
  - a) movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people, such as monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites; groups of buildings which, as a whole, are of historical or artistic interest; works of art; manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections and important collections of books or archives or of reproductions of the property defined above;
  - a) buildings whose main and effective purpose is to preserve or exhibit the movable cultural property defined in sub-paragraph (a) such as museums, large libraries and depositories of archives, and refuges intended to shelter, in the event of armed conflict, the movable cultural property defined in sub-paragraph (a);
  - a) centers containing a large amount of cultural property as defined in sub-paragraphs (a) and (b), to be known as ‘centers containing monuments’.
- **Second Source:** The UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transport of Ownership of Cultural Property<sup>(30)</sup>. The Convention defined “the term ‘cultural property’ as property which, on religious or secular grounds, is specifically designated by each State as being of importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science and which belongs to one of the following categories: property relating to history, products of archaeological excavations, original works of statuary art and sculpture.”

(29) Tawfiq Shermak (Protection of Cultural Property in International Humanitarian Law), Master’s Degree, University of Bejaia, Algeria. 2013, p. 9.

(30) This Convention was adopted during the 38th plenary session on November 14th, 1970.

## ■ Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage represents the values that should be passed on to future generations, whether tangible, such as objects and sites, or intangible, such as customs, traditions, knowledge and language. It is the legacy of physical and tangible artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations.

The UNESCO Convention Concerning the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) defined cultural heritage in the following three paragraphs:

- **Monuments:** architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;
- **Groups of buildings:** groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;
- **Sites:** works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view.

## ■ Tangible Cultural Heritage

Tangible heritage includes buildings, religious and historic places, religious and funerary artifacts, such as temples, cemeteries, mosques, and military and civilian buildings such as fortresses, palaces, castles, baths, barrages, towers and walls, which are considered worthy of preservation for the future. Tangible heritage includes objects significant to the archaeology, architecture, science or technology of a specific culture. Its preservation is important to the study of human history because it provides a concrete basis for ideas, and can validate them, as opposed to a reproduction or surrogate<sup>(31)</sup>.

## ■ Intangible Cultural Heritage (Living Heritage)

The intangible cultural heritage means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills that communities transmit from generation to generation<sup>(32)</sup>.

(31) <http://www.unesco.org/new/ar/cairo/culture/tangible-cultural-heritage/>

(32) Refer to the definition of intangible heritage in the text of article 2 of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003).





# **Methodology of the Report**



This report is based on investigative field research during which Mwatana Organization for Human Rights conducted thorough investigations in nine<sup>(33)</sup> Yemeni governorates. These nine governorates witnessed violations and attacks against cultural property and objects, with most of them possessing a great historical, artistic and spiritual value.

Mwatana documented this report in various contexts since the second half of 2014 and for a period of three years. In these contexts, the incidents were the result of different types and complex patterns of violations and attacks on cultural objects in Yemen. At least 34 sites that have been documented by Mwatana have been subjected to various types of attacks, such as aerial bombardments, ground attacks, bombings, vandalism, deliberate destruction and damage, as well as hostile acts against these cultural objects or their deliberate use for direct military purposes.

During field visits, Mwatana's research unit was able to gather testimonies of people who were eyewitnesses to those violations that targeted these cultural objects. Among those who testified, were officials and individuals who lived near this cultural property or attended it to observe their religious duties. The research for this report includes more than 76 interviews conducted for over more than three years. Mwatana's team documented these interviews during field visits and was able to document more than one testimony for every attack involving such cultural property.

Mwatana didn't offer any financial or in-kind payment to those who testified, and the identities of some people who testified in parts of this report were kept anonymous for the sake of their safety.

In its ranking of the incidents presented in the report, Mwatana listed first the archaeological sites associated with the history of ancient Yemen and then included the monuments associated with the historical periods that followed. For the purposes of the report, Mwatana has provided a historical overview of all the cultural properties it has documented, by referring to reliable and recognized historical and academic references.

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(33) The nine governorates where monuments and cultural property have been subjected to attacks and violations are: Amanat Al-Asemah, Aden, Taiz, Hadhramaut, Marib, Lahij, Abyan, Al Jawf and Al Mahwit.



# **Executive Summary**

The targeting of cultural property and monuments is one of the areas of agreement for all warring parties in Yemen. The destruction of historical monuments and artifacts and archeological and religious buildings is the main manifestation of the country's descent into the abyss of a war without a resolution; a war that has affected everything and has not spared the life and property of Yemenis, including their ancient past and their unifying culture. Similarly, the damages caused by the war even affected the collective memory of Yemenis that is represented by their historical heritage and unique construction style, which is evident in their imposing fortresses, castles and high towers, and their original decorations on the walls of their places of worship.

Since the outbreak of armed conflicts in the middle of 2014<sup>(34)</sup>, cultural objects in Yemen have been subjected to many different types of violations and attacks. These violations have affected many historical monuments, buildings and museums and took various forms, such as aerial bombardments, shelling attacks, vandalism, destruction and damage, as well as conducting hostile acts from the vicinity of these cultural objects or using them deliberately for direct military purposes. In addition, some cultural property has been subjected to composite violations; some have been subjected to airstrikes and ground shelling, military use and even destruction and damage.

All parties to the conflict have engaged in violations and attacks on cultural property. These attacks have caused enormous damage to some of these properties and even amounted to the destruction of two religious landmarks in Taiz (Al Sudi Dome - Al Rumaymeh Dome) by an extremist group active in areas under the authorities of President Hadi's government.

During the period covered by this report, Mwatana for Human Rights documented 15 historical and archaeological sites – some of which were being used by Ansar Allah group (Houthis) – that were directly targeted by air attacks launched by the fighter jets of the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Among these sites are the historic town of Baraqish and the northern gateway to the old Ma'rib dam.

Frequent air attacks by coalition aircrafts have also damaged historical buildings in the old city of Sana'a. The first air strike targeting the ancient city of Sana'a, listed on the World Heritage List<sup>(35)</sup>, was on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015, and the latest strike was on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016, according to the incidents documented by Mwatana in the context of this report. The airstrike of the Arab coalition fighters also took place in other historical sites, such as the famous Kawkaban fortress, which is known for its wall and its unique construction. Religious landmarks were not immune to the missiles of the coalition strikes. Al-Hadi

(34) The security and military situation in Yemen has witnessed a major escalation since the year 2014. The Ansar Allah group (Houthis) has played a major role in the outbreak of many armed conflicts, especially with the takeover of Amran governorate, which is adjacent to the Yemeni capital Sana'a. For more details, see: <http://www.aljazeera.net/knowledgegate/opinions/2014/7/16/%D8%B3%D9%82%D9%88%D8%B7-%D8%B9%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88%D8%B5%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%AB%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A2%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA>

(35) <http://www.unesco.org/new/ar/doha/culture/world-heritage/>



Mosque in Sa'ada was severely damaged by two coalition air strikes on Saturday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015 and Sunday, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Al-Hadi Mosque is one of the most important religious landmarks in the ancient city of Sa'ada and the most important one at a religious level. In addition, Arab Coalition fighters attacked other cultural objects, including the Military Museum in Aden on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The same museum was previously attacked by a military force affiliated with Ansar Allah group (Houthis) and its former ally, former president Saleh. They shelled the museum with artillery shells as they stormed the Crater District in mid-April 2015, before taking over it and staying inside.

On the other hand, the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) and the forces of former President Saleh launched ground attacks with tanks and artillery, targeting archaeological sites, historic buildings and museums. These attacks clearly damaged and destroyed these monuments. On March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015, an Ansar Allah (Houthis) tank targeted the Dar al-Hajar Palace in the Al-Houta district, the capital of Lahij governorate. The attack resulted in extensive destruction of parts of the palace. More than three years ago, many ground attacks by Ansar Allah group (Houthis) and the forces of former President Saleh focused on archaeological sites in the city of Taiz, which is known for its famous historical mosques with adorned domes and high minarets. On Wednesday, June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016, at 4:30 pm, the historical Madrassa and Mosque of Al-Ashrafiya were subjected to sudden artillery bombardment by the Ansar Allah group (Houthis). The shelling targeted the eastern minaret of the mosque and resulted in a large gap in the center. The Ansar Allah group (the Houthis) has the highest rate in terms of using cultural objects for military purposes and carrying out hostile acts, starting with some historic fortresses and archaeological sites. On August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014, the group's fighters took control of the ancient city of Baraqish and used it for purely military purposes. Prior to their withdrawal, in early April 2016, they planted land mines on the borders of the archaeological city.

Other cultural properties were destroyed and vandalized by militant groups. On Friday, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015, a car bomb attack on the southwestern outskirts of the historic city of Shibam-Hadhramaut, caused minor and severe damages to around 240 houses, built of rammed earth<sup>(36)</sup>.

In Aden, members of the Ansar al-Sharia group attacked the historical Hindu temple. They came aboard three military vehicles, stormed the temple, and destroyed the statues and paintings that it contained. The churches of the city of Aden were also affected, with many of their statues and icons destroyed by the Ansar Allah group (Houthis). More than 15 archaeological and historical sites and landmarks in the city were also affected, either by being used directly for military purposes, for carrying out military operations inside these sites or from areas adjacent to them or for refuge.

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(36) <https://ar.unesco.org/silkroad/silk-road-themes/world-heritage-sites/mdyn-shbm-lqdy-m-lmswr>







# Recommendations

## ■ ■ To All Parties to the Conflict in Yemen:

- All parties to the conflict in Yemen shall take all necessary measures and actions to spare cultural property and objects any damage or destruction.
- All parties to the conflict should not use cultural objects for military purposes, and should immediately stop planning and conducting hostile acts from within the sites of this property and monuments or even from their vicinity.
- Conduct transparent and impartial investigations into allegations of serious violations of the laws of war, including incidents of attacks on cultural objects and property, publicize these investigations and hold those responsible accountable.
- The need to comply with the rules of international humanitarian law, in particular the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its Protocols, as well as the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols on the Prohibition of Attacks against Cultural Property and Objects.
- Train military personnel to protect cultural property, without affecting or tampering with them, and include procedures for dealing with cultural property in military guides.
- Distinguish cultural property with a distinctive emblem in accordance with article 6 of the Hague Convention.

## ■ ■ To Ansar Allah Group (Houthis):

- Stop any military operation targeting cultural property and objects.
- Refrain from using cultural objects for military purposes, issue an order to prevent this use, cease hostilities from within the area of these objects, refrain from exercising any security and military activities therein and avoid using this property for refuge.
- Respect the laws of war and adhere to the principle of distinction between cultural objects and legitimate military objectives, particularly in cases of attacks that result in losses of cultural property and are not commensurate with any anticipated military advantage.
- Stop hostile actions that target cultural property and religious monuments immediately.

■ ■ **To Ansar al-Sharia Group and al-Qaeda:**

- Stop hostile actions that target cultural property and religious monuments immediately.
- Stop reprisals against religious landmarks immediately.

■ ■ **To the Yemeni Military Forces under the Leadership of President Hadi and the Affiliated Armed Groups (the Group of Abu Abbas in Taiz - and Popular Resistance in the Rest of Yemen):**

- Require the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to provide detailed information about the intended military targets of airstrikes that targeted cultural objects. Public information must also be made public and exercise pressure to provide compensation should violations occurs.
- Stop attacks on cultural property and objects that violate the international humanitarian law.
- Prohibit the use of cultural objects for military purposes, and refrain from taking any hostile measures starting in cultural objects or occurring in their vicinity.
- Stop hostilities that target cultural property and religious monuments immediately.

■ ■ **To the Coalition Countries Led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates:**

- Comply with the rules of international humanitarian law, including the prohibition of attacks targeting cultural objects and attacks that don't distinguish between cultural objects and legitimate military objectives, particularly those that result in loss of cultural property and are not commensurate with any anticipated military advantage.
- Take all possible measures to reduce the extent of damage to cultural objects, which should include the issuance of effective pre-warnings as early as possible.
- Activate a mechanism to investigate air strikes targeting cultural objects directly, even in the absence of any evidence of violations of the laws of war.
- Publish any information on the intended military objectives of airstrikes that hit cultural property, in addition to identifying all of the states participating in these airstrikes.
- Announce the results of the investigations for the purpose of taking disciplinary



action and to activate the issue of prosecutions in the event of violations or war crimes.

- Provide appropriate compensation immediately to the concerned authorities for all damage caused by airstrikes that hit cultural property by mistake.

### ■ ■ **To the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Human Rights Council**

- The 1954 Hague Convention assigns responsibility for the implementation of its provisions to the Protecting Powers that are responsible for safeguarding the interests of the Parties to the conflict and to UNESCO, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention in articles 21, 22 and 23.
- UNESCO and the UN Human Rights Council should support the enforcement of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property and its Protocols, the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols, and urge the parties to the conflict not to target or endanger cultural property and objects.

### ■ ■ **To Arms-Exporting Countries, notably the United States, UK, France, and Italy:**

- Cease arms sales to the parties to the conflict in Yemen since there is a possibility that such weapons will be used to carry out attacks on cultural property and objects that may amount to war crimes.
- Investigate attacks against cultural objects that are likely to have been carried out with weapons manufactured in supplying countries.

### ■ ■ **To the Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen:**

- Investigate attacks launched or caused by all parties to the conflict against cultural property in Yemen.



# **Legal Framework**

International humanitarian law, also known as the laws of war, applies to the armed conflict in Yemen, since hostilities between the warring parties in the Yemeni conflict are subject to all the principles and rules of the international humanitarian law, as well as the customary laws of war. Given the nature of the heated conflict in Yemen, in which the coalition countries led by Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the regular forces of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi clash with non-governmental armed groups represented by the Ansar Allah movement (Houthis), this conflict is classified as a non-international armed conflict<sup>(37)</sup>.

The report examines the violations and attacks on cultural objects (cultural property) in Yemen since the outbreak of the war in mid-2014. These attacks and hostilities took different forms in targeting cultural objects, ranging from aerial bombardment to ground engagements, explosions, vandalism and damage, as well as the intentional use of these cultural objects for military purposes.

The international humanitarian law and the customary laws of war oblige parties to an armed conflict to protect and respect cultural property, since it is “the cultural and spiritual heritage of peoples<sup>(38)</sup>”. The 1954 Hague Convention, the first of UNESCO’s cultural heritage conventions, is the primary international instrument for the protection of cultural property in armed conflict. Yemen ratified the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its First Protocol on February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1970. This Convention obliges all parties to respect existing cultural property, whether it is located on its territory or that of other High Contracting Parties, by refraining from using such property or the means dedicated for its protection or surrounding areas, directly for purposes that may lead to its destruction or damage in the event of an armed conflict and by refraining from taking any hostile action against it.

The preamble to the Hague Convention stressed that “damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world.” Cultural objects by their very nature are irreplaceable civilian objects in the event of any damage. Moreover, the impact of the destruction of cultural objects not only constitutes a loss for the country

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(37) For further clarification on the classification of the armed conflict in Yemen, refer to: (Questions and Answers: Yemen Conflict and International Law), Human Rights Watch, visit the following link: <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2015/04/07/267889>

(38) Article 53 of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention (Protection of Cultural Objects and Places of Worship) reads as follows: “Without prejudice to the provisions of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of 14 May 1954, and of other relevant international instruments, it is prohibited: **(a)** to commit any acts of hostility directed against the historic monuments, works of art or places of worship which constitute the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples; **(b)** to use such objects in support of the military effort; **(c)** to make such objects the object of reprisals.” Furthermore, article 16 of the Second Protocol to the Geneva Convention stipulates the following: “Without prejudice to the provisions of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of 14 May 1954, it is prohibited to commit any acts of hostility directed against historic monuments, works of art or places of worship which constitute the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples, and to use them in support of the military effort.”



of origin, but also for the cultural heritage of all peoples. Given the extreme importance of these cultural objects, the parties to the conflict must adhere strictly to the principle of distinction, which is the most important pillar of international humanitarian law. This principle calls upon all warring parties to distinguish permanently between civilian objects and military objectives<sup>(39)</sup>, because cultural objects are of utmost importance to peoples. Civilian objectives represent all objectives that aren't military. The military objectives are "objects that make an effective contribution to military action, whether by nature, location, purpose or use, and whose partial or whole destruction, seizure or disruption in the prevailing conditions at the time, constitute a definite military advantage."<sup>(40)</sup>

The Hague Convention provides for the general protection of all cultural property and places the responsibility of its protection on the shoulders of all parties to the conflict, requiring them to guarantee the protection of cultural property in the territory where military operations are occurring. The parties to the conflict may not use cultural property or its immediate surroundings for purposes that may lead to their destruction or damage. Any hostile acts against cultural property are prohibited, except in cases where compelling military necessities are required<sup>(41)</sup>. The parties to a conflict may not seize, destroy or cause damage to cultural property, and shall put an end to acts of theft, looting or vandalism against such property.<sup>(42)</sup>

The Hague Convention obligates all parties to respect existing cultural property, whether it is present on their territory or the territory of other High Contracting Parties, by refraining from using such property or means dedicated for its protection or adjacent areas, directly for purposes that may lead to its destruction or damage in the event of an armed conflict and by refraining from taking any hostile action.

In the incidents detailed in this report, Mwatana for Human Rights found that the extensive destruction of Yemeni cultural property by all parties to the conflict is an explicit violation of the prohibition imposed by the laws of war, with respect to the use of cultural objects for military purposes or the establishment of military objectives in their surroundings<sup>(43)</sup>, which may expose it to destruction. No evidence has been found that confirms that such use of cultural objects, which directly subjected them to acts of damage and destruction, meets the conditions of military necessity. It is clear, however, that the parties to the conflict did not accord the appropriate attention to archaeological sites, in accordance with international humanitarian law standards, which led to the flagrant destruction of considerable cultural property.

The international humanitarian law also prohibits that parties to a conflict make cultural property, such as buildings used for religious, artistic, scientific, educational or charitable

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(39) ICRC, Study on customary international humanitarian law, rule 7.

(40) First Protocol of the Geneva Convention, art. 52, ICRC, study on customary international humanitarian law, rules 8 and 9; 52

(41) Refer to article 4 (1-2) of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

(42) ICRC, Study on Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rule 40 (a)

(43) Article 8 of the "Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict".

purposes<sup>(44)</sup>, objects of reprisal. It also prohibits and prevents any form of theft, looting or destruction of cultural property, stops such acts if necessary, and likewise prohibits any acts of vandalism against such property. The State should also take, within the scope of its criminal legislation, all measures aimed at prosecuting persons or groups that contravene the provisions of the laws of war or who order violations thereof and imposing criminal or disciplinary sanctions on them regardless of their nationality.<sup>(45)</sup>

Any violation of the rules for the protection of cultural property is a clear violation of international humanitarian law. Parties to the conflict, whether States, non-governmental groups or individuals, are therefore directly responsible for the protection of cultural property and for ensuring that it is not damaged or in danger. The parties to the conflict must also pay compensation for damage to any cultural property. With regard to criminal liability, the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict sets out a list of serious violations of cultural property, whereas the international law considers such grave breaches as war crimes.<sup>(46)</sup>

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(44) Article 4 of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, as well as the First Protocol to the Geneva Convention, article 52.

(45) Article 28 (Sanctions) of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

(46) Article 15 of Protocol II to the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.

# Incidents







# **Chapter I**

## **Ancient Historical Monuments**

# City of Baraqish

## Al-Jawf

In the old Yemeni inscriptions written in Musnad (South Arabian script), the city of Baraqish was known as “Yathill”. The city is located in Wadi Al-Farda on the left side of the paved road which runs from the Sana’a-Ma’rib road towards Wadi Al-Jawf. According to ancient Yemenite inscriptions, Baraqish (Yathill) was a prosperous city in the fifth century BC at the very least and was among the most prominent cities of the kingdom of Ma’in (sixth century BC to 150 BC). One of the factors that enhanced the prosperity of Baraqish is that it occupied a prestigious religious position that attracted people to its temples. In addition, Baraqish

gained great historical importance as it was a major station on the frankincense trade road in the BC era. Historians note that it also remained an important station on the route taken by commercial convoys between Yemen and Basra during the Abbasid Caliphate.<sup>(47)</sup>

Although most of the city’s buildings have been demolished since the fall of the kingdom of Ma’in in the late second century BC and then as a result of the Roman military campaign in the second half of the first century BC, its wall has remained steadfast today, with its fifty-six constructed towers, some of which are 14 meters high<sup>(48)</sup>.

Ansar Allah group (Houthis) took control of the archaeological site of Baraqish in mid-August 2014. During 2015 and 2016, eyewitnesses reported that the ancient city was subjected to nearly 20 air strikes carried out by the fighter jets of the Arab coalition led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The archaeological city was hit by air strikes on Sunday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Wednesday July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015, Tuesday, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015, and Sunday, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016. These attacks and other attacks have caused enormous damage to the wall, towers and temples.

(47) Ahmed Jaber Afif et al.: The Yemeni Encyclopedia /Baraqish, Al-Afif Cultural Foundation, V. 1, E. 1992, p. 152.

(48) Same, p. 153.





■ *Wall of the historic town of Baraqish*      *by: Saddam al-Adwar*

### ■ **Mohammad Ali Abdallah Al Haddad (40 years)**

is an officer in a military post and he reported that the city of Baraqish was bombed more than once by the Arab coalition aircrafts. Al Haddad stated that “the coalition planes bombed it more than once because of the control of the Houthis who used it as a military site and as a location to store their weapons, thinking that the aircrafts would not bomb it. The air strikes have caused substantial damage and destruction to the wall, towers and temple.” He added in the context of his statement:

“The area surrounding Baraqish was completely mined by the Houthis, to repel any progress of the resistance towards the city. After the withdrawal of the Houthis, the resistance took control of the city and the landmines were cleared.” He also pointed out that the fighters of the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) have established a cemetery to bury their dead near the ancient city of Baraqish. “There are currently 25 graves in this cemetery, and the Houthis have put flowers and green plants on them.”<sup>(49)</sup>

### ■ **Naef Saleh Haidar (34 years)**

is another eyewitness who confirmed that Ansar Allah Group (Houthis) controlled the city of Baraqish in the Majzar District since August 2014, “when they were situated at the yellow point on the asphalt line between the District of Majzar (belonging to the province of Ma’rib) and the Al Jawf governorate.” Haidar added: “Since the beginning of “Operation Decisive Storm” and until a while ago, the city was bombed by the Saudi and Emirati Air Forces more than once at different times. I think that more than twenty airstrikes targeted the city.”<sup>(50)</sup>

Concerning the damage resulting from the targeting of the archeological city of Baraqish, Haidar said: “Many parts of the wall, guard towers and the temple inside the city were destroyed, in addition to the modern annexes that are outside, such as: grocery store, guard room for soldiers, covered courtyard and car park that was allocated to the archaeological teams that were excavating in the city before 2006.” As for the current situation of the city, Haidar stresses that the armed forces and groups affiliated with the government of President Hadi use it as a military location, since the withdrawal of the fighters of Ansar Allah (Houthis) at the beginning of April 2016.

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(49) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Mohammad Ali Al Haddad, August 25th, 2016.

(50) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Naef Saleh Haidar, August 25th, 2016

# Northern Gateway to the Old Ma'rib Dam

The Ma'rib dam is one of the oldest dams in the world. It dates back to the era of the kingdom of Sheba (1200 BC - 275 BC). The construction of the dam began in the eighth century BC and it continued to develop and expand until it took its final and complete shape with all its facilities and outlets in the fifth century BC<sup>(51)</sup>.

The dam, which irrigated about 98,000 square kilometers, was built of stones cut off from mountain rocks. The stones were carefully sculpted to be identical, placed on top of each other and fixed with gypsum. Copper and lead rods were used in its construction and were estimated to be 16 meters long, with a diameter of around 4 centimeters. These rods were inserted into the stone holes as nails to connect the rocks

to each other, in order to give the dam strength and stability in the face of the dangers of earthquakes and violent torrents.

The Ma'rib dam is considered one of the finest dams in terms of engineering. Engineers examined the nature of the land before the construction of the dam, and then elaborated the engineering plan. The dam is comprised of a huge stone wall built on an obverse angle, in an area called "Al Dim Connector"<sup>(52)</sup>, where the water flows out of the valley. This stone wall extends from the south to the north at a distance of 650 meters. It has openings and doors that open and close as needed to let the water pass through in the surrounding "sluices" to irrigate fields, orchards and farms<sup>(53)</sup>. Yemenis view the Ma'rib Dam as a symbol of their ancient civilization and glorious history.

In the early months of the war waged by the Arab Coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the northern gate of the Ma'rib dam was hit by an air strike. According to eyewitnesses, at approximately 2:30 pm - 2:40 pm on Saturday, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015, the northern gate (the northern water bank) was damaged by an air strike launched by the coalition aircraft. This air strike caused major damage to the dam's gate and caused severe damage, while armed men and military vehicles belonging to Ansar Allah group were stationed at the northern and southern gates of the old dam.

(51) Ahmed Jaber Afif et al., op. cit., p. 510

(52) "Al Dim" is the khat in the Yemeni dialect, and here, reference is made to the legend that was caused by large rats breached the dam by digging under it, causing its collapse, which necessitated tying khat in the area in order to eliminate the rats.

(53) A.D. Mohammed Suhail Takouch: History of the Arabs before Islam, Dar El Nafaes, 2009, first edition.





■ *Northern gateway to the old Ma'rib dam* by: Saddam al-Adwar

## ■ **Mohammad Ali (40 years)**

is an army officer, and he started relating his testimony concerning the raid with a brief description of the situation that prevailed at the time. Mohammad said: “I live in Al-Minin area, on the road leading to the Ma’rib Dam. My house is located on the road leading to Al-Minin, to the south about six kilometers away from the northern and southern gates of the dam. From April 2015 until the end of September, strong clashes occurred between Ansar Allah group (the Houthis) and the government forces and the resistance. Of course, most of the people of the area fled; they left their homes and their farms because of the clashes in the areas of Minin and Faw, which were under the control of the Houthis, while the resistance was concentrated in the city and the government compound. My family and I didn’t leave the house.”

Mohammad added: “On Saturday, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015, right after lunch, at around 2:30 pm or 2:40 pm, we heard warplanes flying, and then suddenly, we heard the sound of a loud explosion. I went up to the roof of my house to see exactly where the air strikes happened. I saw the smoke rising from the northern gate and I knew that it had been targeted or a car or something next to the gate was targeted.”<sup>(54)</sup>

He continued: “I could not go out to check if the gate was blown up until after the Houthis withdrew from Al-Minin and from the dam in October 2016. Then, I saw that the gate was destroyed and badly damaged as a result of the air strike that day.”

## ■ **Ali Salem (33 years)**

is another eyewitness who lives in the area and he witnessed the destruction of the dam’s northern gate as a result of the air strike. Similarly to Mohammad Ali, Ali Salem started his testimony with a brief description of the prevailing circumstances that the residents of the area suffered from during the fighting. Ali said: “I live in Al-Minin area, on the banks of the Ma’rib Dam’s valley, through which the water of the dam passes when the spillway gate is opened. Despite the ongoing clashes and the war, we didn’t leave our houses, farms and cattle in the Faw and Al-Minin areas because they are our main source of livelihood and income. We stayed home, continued doing our work and didn’t interfere in the clashes, even though we lost many friends, neighbors and relatives.”<sup>(55)</sup>

He added: “When the clashes erupted next to the dam, I knew that we would pay the price and that the dam would be damaged, because the war is ruthless. The area was under the control of the Houthis. At that time, I noticed that there were people, fighters, vehicles,

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(54) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Mohammad Ali, April 19th, 2016.

(55) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Ali Salem, April 19th, 2016.

gangs and special cars stationed at the northern and southern gates and around the old dam. We would always hear the sounds of clashes and shooting from there. Then came the day when I heard and saw a strong explosion caused by a bomb dropped by an aircraft of the Arab Coalition. The aircraft targeted the northern gate/the northern spillway of the old Ma'rib Dam, which connected the dam to the southern gate. We, the inhabitants of the region, call it "Al Dim Connector", and these northern and southern spillways, were the remains of the old dam. Not only did the air strikes bomb the northern gate, but they launched more than one raid targeting the dam valley, the road leading to the dam, the iron ore over the dam park, and the government's private diwan or bureau."



# Al Bayda Site (Nachaq)

## Al Jawf

This city is named after its bright white stones and is a historic city located in Al Maslub District in Al-Jawf Governorate.

This city was known as “Nashaq” and its name appeared for the first time in history in 680 BC<sup>(56)</sup>. Historical sources say it was an independent city, as it was one of the most famous cities of the kingdom of Ma’in (sixth century BC to 150 BC).

Al Bayda or “Nashaq” is a city rich in engravings and monuments, and enjoys a unique and embroidered architectural art in various geometric shapes. Its walls were destroyed and only the gate remains.

Since 2015, this historic city has witnessed ongoing armed clashes between Ansar Allah group (Houthis) and the “Popular Resistance” loyal to President Hadi. Because of the ongoing clashes, Mwatana was not able to visit this archaeological site to inspect the incurred damage more closely.

The fighters of the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) took control of Al Bayda when they took control of Al-Jawf governorate in mid-2015. But they withdrew from it on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015, following the attacks of “resistance” fighters. At the time of the reporting, the Popular Resistance controlled 70% of the Al Maslub District, including the historical site of Al-Bayda. However, the area is still close to the areas under the control of Ansar Allah group (Houthis) in the district, as it is only about one kilometer and a half away from the center of the district. Violent clashes are still ongoing in the area.

A number of residents who spoke to Mwatana said that in the past, they complained about the neglect of the official bodies towards the historical and archaeological monuments in Al-Jawf Governorate and about the incident that these bodies were absent and didn't perform their duties. However, according to them, all this has become nothing compared to what these landmarks are exposed to today.

(56) Refer to Wikipedia on the following link: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naschq>

## ■ **Mohammad Ali Jaamal (30 years old)**

is a resident of this area and is a teacher. He said that “the resistance forces entered into the city of Al Hazm, which is the capital of the Al Jawf governorate, the center of Al Maslub District and some of the areas in the district, including the historical sites of Al Bayda and Al Sawda’. These forces used the archeological sites for military purposes”.

Jaamal added: “In the beginning, the Houthis stationed themselves in the Al Bayda site because their military positions in the Al Hayja region aren’t located very far away from Al Bayda to the north. With the engagements between the Houthis and the resistance escalating, they withdrew at the end of 2015. This front has witnessed some of the most heated fighting in the district, since both sides were constantly exchanging fire with machine guns, mortars and Katyusha rockets.”<sup>(57)</sup>

Jaamal continued relating his testimony, recalling the time when the site of Al-Bayda was an attraction for foreign tourists and Yemeni citizens alike, twenty years ago. This recollection did not dispel any regret for the lack of interest of the state in the Al Bayda site, and other archaeological sites in Al Jawf, dating back to the era of the Ma’in Kingdom.

He continued: “The Al Bayda site is located to the west of Al Maslub, the center of the District, and it is an archaeological site that is still buried under the sand. Only a part of the all from the west is apparent and still exists.” While expressing his regret to what archeological sites have been subjected to, Jaamal said: “During certain periods of time, these archeological sites were vandalized, looted and stolen by citizens and some sheikhs of the region. They would dig randomly in the hopes of striking gold, without feeling that they were destroying and sabotaging the history of these sites and a civilization that spreads over thousands of years. The state did not do anything back then to protect these monuments and now also, the archaeological sites are seriously damaged. Because of the clashes and the conversion of archaeological sites to military sites, and the transformation of the area in general to a military area, citizens can no longer enter the area”.

## ■ **Yassin, (a pseudonym) (45 years old)**

is another educator who testified about the damage caused to the archaeological site (Nashaq). His testimony began with an appreciation of the old Yemeni man, who was able to “build a civilization”; while today man can’t build a similar structure “despite the possibilities available”. As for the damage caused to the site, he said that the extent of the damage was still unknown, due to the continuing confrontations in the area. “No one can approach the site”. Delving into the details of his testimony, Yassin said:

“The Houthis were stationed in Al Bayda since they took control of the district. They

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(57) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Mohammad Ali Jaamal, January 17th, 2017.

withdrew from Al Bayda and several areas of the Al Maslub District at the end of 2015, after which, the resistance took control of the Al Bayda and Al Sawda' archaeological sites, in addition to some areas of the district. The Al Bayda site contains buildings and columns that are still buried under the sand, except for a small part of the wall on the western side of the site. Since the resistance entered this site and the Houthis withdrew to the Al Hayja and Amlaha areas, the two sides exchanged bombardments by using all kinds of medium sized and heavy weapons. Since the beginning of 2016 and until now, the confrontations and shelling have not stopped, especially at night. They scare our women and our children, and we have sleepless nights because we are worried about the shelling and clashes. During the day, we don't hear anything."<sup>(58)</sup>

### ■ Nader, (a pseudonym) (40 years old);

is one of the district's resident who were displaced from the areas of confrontation. He can't assess the extent of damage to the Al Bayda archaeological site, in view of the continued fighting. But he also regrets that the parties to the conflict did not appreciate the importance of archaeological sites.

In his testimony to Mwatana, Nader said: "In December 2015, the resistance took control of the Al Bayda area and turned the archaeological and historical site into a military site". At the same time, he clarified that Ansar Allah fighters (Houthis) were targeting the resistance's sites by launching shells from Al Bayda archeological site, since it is high and overlooks the areas of the Al Maslub District.

He continued: "The Al Bayda and Al Sawda' sites are rich in antiquities and ancient stones. The remains are still buried under the sand, and they are considered attractions for everyone who comes to Al Maslub because it tells the history and origin of the ancient Ma'in Kingdom. Unfortunately, these antiquities fell into the hands of people who didn't recognize or appreciate them. People used to tamper with these sites and dig there and today they have become military and war sites operated by armed groups. The resistance transformed the Al Bayda archaeological site into a war zone and bombards Houthi sites in Al Hayja and Amlaha with various missiles. The Houthis bombard Al Bayda site with all kinds of medium sized and heavy weapons. Confrontations and mutual bombardments between the two sides occur on a daily basis and at night the intensity of the confrontations escalates. We have not heard that either side is advancing on this front. None of these parties have advanced and only managed to destroy our monuments and civilization, intimidate citizens and prevent farmers from cultivating their land. Citizens can't enter Al Bayda or Al Hayja areas because of the confrontations. We can't go there"<sup>(59)</sup>.

(58) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, January 25th, 2017.

(59) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, January 25th, 2017.



# Al Sawda' Site (Nashan)

## Al Jawf

Al Sawda' city took its name in recent times, from its black stones, which is a style for designation known in the Yemeni tribes. The city was known in ancient Yemeni inscriptions as "Nashan", and was described as a great city, with a robust wall. Nashan is located in the Al Maslub District in Al-Jawf Governorate, and dates back to the 8th century BC (715 BC). In its first

phase, it was independent and sovereign and then it joined the Ma'in state and achieved a large commercial, religious and industrial success. In a later phase, it joined the kingdom of Sheba with the rest of the Ma'in state<sup>(60)</sup>.

The city was also known as one of the most important cities in the manufacture of metal vessels in the Ma'in Kingdom and the remains of ores of different minerals were found. But the great importance of the city comes from the fact that it is the city of temples; it retains the remnants of several temples described as some of the most beautiful temples in the entire Arabian Peninsula. In this ancient archeological city, there is a group of temples known as the "daughters of Aad" (temples of Attar) and the ruins of its buildings with many columns that are still standing. Parts of these columns were buried by the wind under the sand, and the rest of them are more than two and a half meters above the ground. These columns are characterized by the fact that each one of them is sculpted from one rock, and depict various human, animal and architectural forms.

Al Sawda' city is located about 700 meters to the east of Al Maslub, on the main dirt road leading to the center of the district and there is no population grouping nearby.

Both sides of the war exchanged control over the ancient site of Al Sawda'; Ansar Allah group (Houthis) took control of it in mid-2015, and its fighters withdrew from it on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Later, it was dominated by President Hadi's popular resistance fighters but the clashes didn't stop. The site is witnessing military operations and violent clashes that are still ongoing till this day.

When Mwatana visited Al Jawf governorate, they found that most citizens there are very reluctant about giving their testimony or providing information on the subject of this report because resistance fighters are deployed in the area and impose their control over it. Because the confrontations are continuing, Mwatana was unable to visit the archaeological site and see the extent of the damage.

(60) The Ma'ini city of Al Sawda'... Yemen's history in the wind, on the following link: <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/cultureandart/2014/6/20/%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8E%D8%B9%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D9%8A%D9%85%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D9%87%D8%A8%D9%91-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AD>

## ■ **Mohammad Ali Jaamal (30 years old)**

is a teacher at the Al Maslub School and gave his testimony about the Al Sawda' location as well, but he didn't know the "exact" scope of the damage because of the ongoing confrontations. Jaamal said: "We weren't able to reach the site and inspect the destruction that happened and is happening." He then added: "The Al Sawda' archaeological site is located to the east of Al Maslub, which is in the form of high hills. Because it disappeared under piles of dirt, sand and stones, Al Sawda' or "Nashan" - the Ma'ini name - is considered as one of the most important archaeological sites and monuments in Al Jawf. It has unfortunately been turned into a military and war site for the resistance forces, and there are certainly those who loot the monuments on the site, not to mention the damage caused by the Katyusha rockets and other attacks, which we have seen more than once targeting Al Sawda.'" (61)

## ■ **Mohammad Mabrouk Ayyach (50 years old)**

is a member of the local council in Al Maslub District. He started his testimony by talking about how the Al Sawda' archeological site was turned into a military site. Ayyach said: "In December 2015, President Hadi's resistance controlled many areas of the Al Maslub District, including the ancient Al Sawda' site, which turned into a military site. When the Houthis were in control of the Al Maslub, they did not use Al Sawda' site as a military site for the length of their presence."

In the context of his testimony, Ayyash spoke about the significance of the archeological site of Al Sawda' for the Yemeni nation. He said: "It represents the history and civilization of our old generations and represents a great source of pride for us. Until the 1990s, foreign tourists came to visit Al Sawda' and Al Bayda in our district, Al Maslub, and took pictures of these archaeological sites. It was one of the main cities in the Ma'in Kingdom and many of its buildings and pillars are still standing, but buried under the sand."

As for the damage caused to the archaeological site as a result of the continuation of the fighting and its use as a military site, Ayyash confirms what was stated in the previous testimonies: "We do not know the extent of the damage incurred since the resistance entered and turned the site into a military site. It is full of precious ancient monuments, of bronze, marble and gold statues ... buried under the sand. The state did not excavate it and remove it from under the sand. In the past, citizens would dig in the site to get gold or beads because of poverty and unemployment in the region. They would tamper with the site because of a lack of awareness about this civilization and history and the absence of the state. After the resistance took control of Al Sawda' archaeological site and converted into a military site, nobody can come close to this site. The resistance bombarded the sites

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(61) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Mohammad Ali Jaamal, January 17th, 2017.

of the Houthis in Al Sakkia and Al Ghayl with Katyusha rockets and mortars. The Houthis also responded by bombarding Al Sawda' with Katyusha rockets. Therefore, we don't know the extent of the damage done to this archaeological site<sup>(62)</sup>.”

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(62) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Mohammad Ayyach, January 17th, 2017.



The background is a complex collage. At the top, a large, light-colored domed building with intricate carvings is visible. To the left, a tall, slender minaret rises. The bottom of the image shows a cityscape with various buildings, including some with red roofs. The overall color palette is warm, with shades of brown, orange, and yellow.

# **Chapter II**

## **Cities Listed on the World Heritage List**

# City of Shibam- Hadhramaut

Shibam-Hadhramaut is an ancient archeological city. It is believed that this city was mentioned for the first time in the Musnad inscriptions of the Kingdom of Hadhramaut. However, the city of Shibam in its present form dates back to the sixteenth century AD. The city is considered to be one of the oldest and best models of meticulous urban organization that is based on a

vertical construction system. It is referred to as “Manhattan of the Desert” because of its tall and towering buildings that emanate from the rocks. The World Heritage Committee of UNESCO listed the city of Shibam-Hadhramaut on the World Heritage List in 1982.

When it met in Bonn, Germany, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee announced in July 2015 the inclusion of the Yemeni city of Shibam-Hadhramaut and its wall on the list of world heritage in danger<sup>(63)</sup>. A car bomb explosion in the southern part of the city has damaged more than 200 homes. The Islamic state claimed responsibility for the attack at a later time<sup>(64)</sup>.



■ City of Shibam – Hadhramaut by: Mohammed Sami

(63) <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2015/07/230892>

(64) <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/2015/11/20/%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D9%84-%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%85-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%86-%D9%82%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%B9%D8%B3%D9%83%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%AD%D8%B6%D8%B1%D9%85%D9%88%D8%AA>



### ■ **Abdallah Awad Abed (53 years old)**

is an employee of the General Authority for the Preservation of Historic Cities and he was an eyewitness to the explosion. Abdallah said: “At 6:20 am, on Friday, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015, an explosion took place in the southwestern part of the historical city of Shibam. I went there to inspect the situation and saw the injured people and the houses that were damaged. The next day, local authorities formed a committee to control the damage that the city sustained. The committee included a member of the General Authority for the Preservation of Historic Cities, a member of the local authority, experts in clay architecture experts, with the participation of civil society organizations in the city. The work of the committee took two weeks, during which it was assessed that 240 houses sustained damages varying between serious, moderate and mild. It should be noted that 10 houses have been rehabilitated with the funding of the deputy governor of Hadhramaut governorate for the directorates of the valley and the desert”.<sup>(65)</sup>

### ■ **Hassan Aaydid Taha Aaydid (46 years old)**

is the head of the General Authority for the Preservation of Historic Cities. He also gave his testimony concerning this incident and he said: “At 6:30 am, on Friday, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015, one of the General Authorities’ employees informed that a big explosion happened in the south of the city. The next day, I went there myself to inspect the situation and I saw the damages incurred. The local authorities established a committee that included civil society organizations, to control the damage in the city. It was noted that 240 houses sustained damage varying between serious, moderate and mild. Through the funding of the local authorities in the Hadhramaut valley, ten houses that were seriously damaged were rehabilitated and ten additional houses need an immediate intervention.”

The head of the General Authority for the Preservation of Historic Cities then gave a lengthy description about the city of Shibam and its historic standing; “The city of Shibam is one of the most famous cities in Hadhramaut and was present in history since the factors of stability and urbanization prevailed in it. The commercial market of Hadhramaut imported goods from Dhofar and other places through camel caravans that were amazed by its ruins. It also received goods by sea through “Bi’r ‘Ali” first and then through Ash Shihr. The city of Shibam – Hadhramaut is one of the three most important historical cities in Yemen and is one of the three Yemeni cities listed in the World Heritage List since 1982 with Sana’a and Zabid, because of its unique architectural style. In 2007, the city of Shibam received the The Aga Khan Award for Architecture in the Islamic Architecture category.”<sup>(66)</sup>

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(65) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Abdallah Awad, May 4th, 2016.

(66) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Hassan Aaydid, May 4th, 2016.

# Al Qasimi Neighborhood in the Old City of Sana'a

Sana'a is located in the middle of the Yemeni plateau, at an altitude of 2150 meters, along the western slope of Mount Naqam. In the past, the city occupied only a small area, but the area of urbanization increased during the Islamic periods and expanded the circle of its wall. The first mention of the city of Sana'a was in the ancient Yemeni inscriptions and dates back to the first century AD<sup>(67)</sup>. Newsmen say the city

of Sana'a has been inhabited for about 2,500 years<sup>(68)</sup>. The Ottoman presence in its first phase (1539-1634) and second phase (1872-1911) had the most significant effect on the construction of the old city of Sana'a that remains as it is today.

During its General Conference held in Belgrade in 1980, UNESCO decided to launch an international campaign to preserve the old city of Sana'a. In 1986, UNESCO listed the city on its World Heritage List.

■ *Old city of Sana'a* by: Ahmed al-Amri



(67) Ahmad Jaber Afif et al., op. cit., p. 586.

(68) Same source



Al Qasimi Bustan (garden) is one of the most famous gardens in the historic city of Sana'a. It is located in the south west of old Sana'a and "Al Sa'ila" separates it from the Al Sultan Bustan. Like other gardens in old Sana'a, it is surrounded by houses from all sides.

Mwatana Organization for Human Rights had documented an air strike launched by the Arab Coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE and that targeted the Al-Qasimi neighborhood on Friday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The air strike killed five people, including a woman and a 16-year-old boy. The raid destroyed four houses in the historic city of Sana'a and caused serious damage to other nearby houses. The presence of military targets in the location targeted by the raid was not proved and confirmed to Mwatana. It should also be noted that Amnesty International has documented that houses of citizens in the old city of Sana'a<sup>(69)</sup> were targeted by the Arab coalition aircrafts.

About a month after this incident occurred, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, which met in Bonn, Germany, on June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, inscribed the Old City of Sana'a and the Old Walled City of Shibam on the List of World Heritage in Danger<sup>(70)</sup>. The news clip published on the United Nations News website quoted the following from the World Heritage Committee:

"The Old City of Sana'a sustained serious damage due to armed conflict in the country. The neighborhood of al Qasimi near the famous urban garden of Miqshamat al Qasimi sustained particularly serious damage. The 12th century al-Mahdi Mosque and surrounding houses have also been affected."



■ *AL Qasimi neighborhood in the old city of Sana'a* by: Basheer al-Samawi

(69) <https://www.amnesty.org/ar/latest/news/2015/07/yemen-airstrike-analysis-shows-saudi-arabia-killed-scores-of-civilians/>

(70) <http://www.un.org/arabic/news/story.asp?NewsID=23978#.WbaVH7KGOM8>

## ■ Ali Ahmad (40 years)

was a witness to the bombing of Al-Qasimi Neighborhood by the Arab coalition aircrafts and gave the following testimony:

“On Friday, June 12<sup>th</sup> (Sha’ban 25<sup>th</sup>), 2015, at 2:00 am, we heard the sound of planes flying over us and then our neighborhood, al-Qasimi, was bombed, specifically the “Meqshamah”<sup>(71)</sup>. The strike was strong, and our house shook. We went outside to see what happened, and we saw four houses that collapsed at the same moment. We were able to trace the trail of the bomb and noticed that it exploded in the house in the middle between the collapsed houses. The bomb came from behind the houses and fell into the sewage hole. Five people from the same family, including a child and a woman, were killed in the incident. While we were trying to retrieve the corpses, we heard the sound of the plane again, and fled, thinking it would hit the place again. After its sound faded, we went back to continue retrieving the corpses.”

As for the old historic buildings that sustained damage, Ali said: “Some houses were cracked by the blast and they were demolished for reconstruction. They are old houses built with the old style of rammed earth”<sup>(72)</sup>.

## ■ Arwa Jaber (28 years old)

described in her testimony to Mwatana the tragedy that befell her. She is a housewife and she lost her son and her husband because of that air strike. Arwa said: “I was in my father’s house because I was pessimistic about this place (her husband’s house) because it was close to Al-Oradi (an archeological building that was turned into the Ministry of Defense’s headquarters). So, I would go to my husband’s house in the morning and return to my father’s house at night because I couldn’t sleep at my husband’s. After midnight, the air strikes started. I heard three to four hits in different places. The second hit struck our house. The sound of the explosion wasn’t very strong and I thought the hits were far away from our house. Ten minutes later, some of our neighbors and my brother-in-law (sister’s husband) called me and told me our house was destroyed and completely collapsed. Then, I called my brother and my uncle. I couldn’t believe it because I never expected the old city of Sana’a to be targeted.”<sup>(73)</sup>

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(71) A Yemeni word used in some popular dialects indicating a place to plant radish and some vegetables.

(72) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Ali Ahmad, April 3rd, 2016.

(73) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Arwa Jaber, April 3rd, 2016.



# Al Foulaihy Neighborhood

## Old City of Sana'a

On Friday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015, at night, an aircraft of the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE fired a bomb that targeted the house of citizen Hafez Allah Al-Aayni in Al Foulaiha neighborhood in old Sana'a. 13 people were killed in the raid, 10 of them from one family. The presence of military targets in the location targeted was not proved and confirmed to Mwatana.



■ *AL Foulaihy neighborhood in the old city of Sana'a* by: Basheer al-Samawi

■ **Abdallah Mohammad Al Masuri (27 years old)**

is an employee at the revenue service and is a resident of Al Foulaihy neighborhood. Concerning the incident, he said the following in his testimony:

“At 11:30 pm on Friday, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015, I was sitting as usual in my room watching television when I heard the sound of planes flying over me. Suddenly, I heard a loud explosion close to the house. I closed my eyes for a few seconds and then opened them but I couldn't see anything because of the dust and the darkness. The windows and their frames were broken. It felt like judgment day. The residents of the area were asleep, and after the explosion everyone ran away in the clothes they had worn while they were sleeping. The women and children were lost and screaming. They didn't know where to go or what to do. They were afraid another strike was going to happen. There wasn't a military gathering or site near us.”<sup>(74)</sup>

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(74) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Abdallah Al Masuri, April 3rd, 2016.



# House in the Old City of Sana'a

Mwatana documented an air strike that occurred at 2 am on Saturday, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2016, when an aircraft of the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates targeted the National Security Apparatus building with 11 bombs. Only four of the bombs that hit the building exploded, while one landed on the ancient Al-Bakiriyya Mosque, which is located about 30 meters away from the NSA building and did not explode. Another bomb landed on the house of Mohammad Al Masuri, (75 years old), which is one of the houses of the historic city of Sana'a, located about 200 meters away from the building of the National Security Apparatus. The bomb did not explode either.

Mohammad Al Masuri was killed in this incident after he was split in half by the bomb's direct fall, while his wife suffered from suffocation. As for the house, the bomb penetrated all its floors until it settled in the garage

The houses near the building of national security were also damaged; the walls of some of them cracked, the glass of the windows shattered and the window frames broke and popped out, particularly the houses of the following families: Rassam, Al Akou', Al Zarka and Al Zaferi.

While giving his testimony about this incident, Youssef Ahmed Abdul Karim (21 years old), who's the neighbor of Al Masuri victim, said:

"The plane flew over with a terrifying sound. I had stopped by the shop in the building right next to the Al Masuri house. We are close to the premises of the National Security Apparatus. It is approximately 200 meters away (he pointed to the end of the neighborhood where one of the National Security Apparatus' buildings appears). At about 2:30 am, we heard the sound of a loud explosion that shook the area. It was a bomb fired by an aircraft at the National Security Apparatus Building. Less than five minutes later, we heard the sound of a second bomb, which hit the house of the Al Masuri; but it did not explode, otherwise the neighboring houses, including where I am now, would have been destroyed by the explosion. Then, several rockets were fired consecutively: five rockets hit the National Security Apparatus Building."

Then, Youssef started talking about the bomb that hit Mohammad Al Masuri's house and he said: "He was old and had a coat shop. Sadly, this bomb came and ended his life. We are lucky that it didn't explode or we, along with all of the neighbors, would have perished. The bomb entered from the northern side and settled in the garage after breaking through all of the floors inside the building. Al Masuri's wife choked because of the smoke and dust, but she did not sustain much damage. They told me she is fine."<sup>(75)</sup>

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(75) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Youssef Ahmad Abdul Karim, September 20th, 2016.

## ■ **Mohammad Abdul Karim Al Hezayli (25 years old)**

also gave a vivid testimony pertaining to this incident. Al Hezayli said: “The first explosion happened in the national security apparatus building. The second bomb hit the house of Mohammad Al Masuri but didn’t explode. Then, 3 bombs hit the national security apparatus building and exploded. The shrapnel flew and damaged houses and alleys surrounding the national security apparatus building. Some window frames popped out of their places and some of them broke. Nobody in these houses was hurt, because they had been displaced the previous day, after receiving warnings. As for the Al Masuri house, Mohammad Al Masuri died after being split into two halves and they did not find one of his hands.<sup>(76)</sup>”

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(76) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Mohammad Al Hezayli, September 20th, 2016.



# **Chapter III Monuments**

# Kawkaban Fortress

It is an archaeological fortress overlooking the city of Shibam Kawkaban, located 36 km to the northwest of the capital Sana'a. This fortress was mentioned in the Musnad inscriptions dating back to the reign of the Kingdom of Sheba (1200 BC - 275 AD). The city prospered and the fortress was rebuilt in a lavish fashion during the reign of the

Yufirid rulers who turned the city into their capital between 847 and 997 AD<sup>(77)</sup>. With the first Ottoman campaign on Yemen, Al-Mutahhar bin Sharaf ad-Din (1503-1572 AD) consolidated the building of the Kawkaban fortress, which was the seat of his rule, and designated the city of Shibam as his capital.

On February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the forces of the Arab coalition, led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, launched an air strike on the historic fortress of Kawkaban, destroying the entire building completely. The fortress' gate was the only way for people to enter and leave the city of Kawkaban. After the shelling, the residents could not help the victims or survive themselves because the rubble and debris blocked the gate. It should be noted that several other airstrikes targeted civilian homes inside the city and resulted in casualties.

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(77) Ahmad Jaber Afif et al., op. cit., p. 186.



■ **Zafer Al Hamdani (60 years old)**

is a resident of the city of Kawkaban and he gave his testimony:

“We heard four airstrikes; three of them targeted the “Al Qushla” – the gate of Kawkaban wall. The first raid was around 4:30 am, and the homes of some citizens were also shelled and we couldn’t attend to the wounded. There was a bomb attack on the club, which is about 200 meters away from the fortress, where there was a military force affiliated to Ansar Allah. We went out on the second day and told them to keep this force away from our city, but they refused<sup>(78)</sup>.”

■ **Concerning the same incident, Ahmad, (33 years old), (a pseudonym), a teacher from Kawkaban city said:**

“At around 4:20 am, I heard the sound of aircrafts flying close by. Then, I heard the explosion after two bombs hit “Al Qushla” - the city gate and its only outlet. Another bomb struck the house of a citizen, destroying it completely, and 10 other houses were partially damaged. There were many dead and wounded who could not be treated as the only exit of the city through Al Qushla was completely destroyed<sup>(79)</sup>.”

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(78) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Zafer Al-Hamdanu, May 2016.

(79) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, May 2016.

# Dar al- Hajar Palace

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## Lahij

Dar Al-Hajar Palace is the largest and most famous historical landmark in the city of Al Houta in the governorate of Lahij. It was built in 1926, during the reign of the Sultan of Lahij Abdul Karim bin Fadel Al A'abdali II (1918-1947). The design of the palace was inspired by Buckingham Palace in London, the palace of King George V, who hosted the Sultan of Lahij Abdulkarim Fadel and his son, Fadel, in 1925. The Sultan and his son were impressed by the palace and, upon returning to Al-Houta, the

Sultan started building his palace, which has a large garden full of trees in the middle. The palace has two entrances from the west and the south, and there is a large courtyard to welcome guests and delegations in front of it.

At the beginning of the ongoing war, the resistance forces were stationed in the palace when the Ansar Allah (Houthi) forces and their former ally, Saleh, arrived on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015 to Al-Houta and wanted to take control. On the morning of Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015, a tank belonging to the forces of Ansar Allah (Houthis) and Saleh reached Sufyan road, which is about one and a half kilometers north of the palace. At 10 am that morning, the tank fired several shells, one of which hit the upper part of the palace on the north-west side. The palace was also exposed to fire from many light and medium weapons, including an RPG that the forces of Ansar Allah (Houthis) and Saleh forces used in their attack. The damage sustained by the palace remains visible until today.

## ■ **Wahid Saleh Sleiman (35 years old)**

is an eyewitness to what happened to Dar al-Hajar Palace. Wahid said:

“I live in the palace of Dar al-Hajar, on the upper floor to the northwest, in the part that was hit by the tank shell. The ownership of the Dar al-Hajar palace is to the sultans of Lahij who ruled in Lahij and Aden in the old days. My family and I have lived in that part of the palace since 2014, with the consent of the agent of the sultans, provided I do not change anything in the palace and preserve it. The agents allowed many people to live in the palace on the same conditions, since they had no housing. When the forces of the Houthis and Saleh arrived at the outskirts of Al-Houta, specifically the northern sides and the Sufyan road, we saw from the palace above the tank standing on the Sufyan road to the north. At 9 am on Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015, when I clearly saw the tank from where I lived, I was afraid for my children and my wife, so I drove them to the village of al-Kaddam in Tuban District. When I returned the next day, I learned from the resistance youth that the tank had fired a shell that hit the upper part, my place of residence. I entered my dwelling and found the debris of the yajour, dirt and some shrapnel on the ground. I cleared out the wreckage and asked the young people who were present during the shelling about the time of the blast. They said that it happened after my family and I left, specifically at 10 am, and that they were eating breakfast under the palace to the south. After cleaning the house and removing the rubble, I decided to leave the house again because the tank belonging to the forces of Saleh and the Houthis was still on the Sufyan road and we could clearly see it from the palace<sup>(80)</sup>.”

## ■ **Maher Hamed Saleh A'arabeh (32 years old)**

is a resident of Al-Houta city and is an eyewitness to what happened to Dar al-Hajar Palace. Maher said:

“In the early days of the war, the palace was used as a military site where the resistance was stationed. The militants of the Houthis and Saleh wanted to enter and occupy the palace. At 10 am on Saturday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the youth of the resistance were above the palace, with PKM and other machine guns, while the tank of the Houthis and Saleh was stationed on Sufyan road about a kilometer north of the palace. At that time, we heard the explosion of a tank shell on the upper floor of the palace to the north-west, and the place was filled with dust and the yajour were falling. So, we knew that the tank bombed the palace. Later, the palace was hit with bullets and RPGs fired by the Houthis and Saleh fighters<sup>(81)</sup>.”

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(80) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Wahid Saleh, February 9th, 2017.

(81) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Maher A'arabeh, February 11th, 2017.

# The Palace of the Abdali Sultan

## Lahij

The palace of Sultan Abdali is located in Al-Houta, the capital of Lahij governorate in the south of Yemen. It was built by Abdul Karim bin Fadel Abdali in 1766, and he was the first sultan from the Abdali, the sheikhs of Lahij and Adan. He ascended to the throne after the death of his father in 1742. It was said that he commissioned the construction of this palace in that same year.<sup>(82)</sup>

As in the case of Dar Al-Hajar in Al Houta in Lahij, some families without housing have lived in this palace since 2014, with the consent of the agent of the owner of the palace, provided that the palace is preserved

and that no changes are made. When the forces of Ansar Allah group (Houthis) and their former ally Saleh entered the city of Al-Houta in the beginning of April 2015, some of its fighters were stationed in the Public Health and Population Office, which is located 100 m to the west of the palace. On the afternoon of Monday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, some of the group's fighters attacked the palace of the Abdali Sultan, forcibly removed the occupants and used it as a military barracks.

(82) Ahmad Jaber Afif et al., op. cit., p. 634.



■ **In his testimony given to Mwatana, Rashad (a pseudonym), (47 years old), said:**

“I do not remember the exact date of that day, but I was in my house, which lies behind the wall of the security administration of Lahij, next to the Sultan’s palace to the east about five meters away. The Houthi fighters were stationed at the Public Health and Population Office about 100 meters west of the palace. At 4:00 in the afternoon, a group of these fighters launched an attack from the Public Health Office against the entire palace and neighborhood. They deployed themselves in the neighborhood, cordoned off the palace and went in. They stayed in the palace for nearly two months. On the first night, they were shooting continuously towards the east. On that day as well, they forced us out of our lodgings. My family and I left and moved in with my father in the neighborhood of the mosque<sup>(83)</sup>.”

■ **Nour Eddine Hassan Abdul Kader A’akil (42 years old), undersecretary of Al-A’anad School, also testified about this incident and said:**

“My house is located next to the palace, on Al-A’ayada Street, in the Zahra’ neighborhood. I heard an explosion so I went out of the house to see what had happened. When I opened the door of the house, I was surprised by the widespread deployment of Houthi and Saleh fighters on the street. I heard the voice of my son yelling in the street, afraid of the soldiers who were deployed. He said to the soldier, “Do not kill me! Do not kill me!” My son fled towards Al-A’ayada, terrified. Immediately afterwards, the palace was occupied by Houthi and Saleh fighters. They turned the palace into a military barracks and positioned themselves as snipers at the top of the castle. This spread fear and panic in the hearts of the people and violated the privacy of their homes, because the palace overlooks the homes of the neighborhood. Then, the Houthi and Saleh fighters forced us to leave our homes or sit in our homes as detainees without water or food. They said to us: Either get out of the house and leave or sit in your homes and stay in. Two days later, I could not stay in the house, so I decided to go to the ‘Obar Lasloun area in the Tuban District<sup>(84)</sup>.”

(83) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, January 27th, 2017.

(84) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Nour Eddine Hassan A’akil, January 30th, 2017.

# Al Qahirah (Cairo) Castle

## Taiz

Al Qahirah (Cairo) Castle is located in the Al Qahirah District, in the city of Taiz, on the northern slope of Mount Sabr, overlooking the old city neighborhoods nearby. It also provides a panoramic view of all the city's neighborhoods. Therefore, it is considered one of the most important spaces for the people of Taiz, especially after the establishment of a park in it which was considered an exquisite artistic masterpiece.

Some historians date the construction of the Al Qahirah Castle to the fifth century AH, while others say that it was commissioned in the first half of the sixth century AH by Sultan Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Sulayhi (439-459 AH/1047-1066 AD) and that it

was expanded during the rule of his brother Ali ibn Muhammad al-Sulayhi (458-484 AH/1066-1091 AD).

The castle has several palaces, including Dar Al Sultan, Dar Al-Imara, Dar Al Adab, and Al-Hamra Fort. It was restored at the turn of the century, in a way that greatly eroded its historical character.<sup>(85)</sup>

■ *AL Qahirah (Cairo) castle – Taiz* by: Ahmed al-Basha



The Al Qahirah Castle was used as a military site by armed groups affiliated to the Abu Abbas faction until August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The castle was then handed over to the security committee formed by the governor of Taiz and was reopened as a tourist attraction. Since the beginning of the conflict that is still ongoing, the popular resistance in the city of Taiz and Ansar Allah (Houthis) have alternated the use of this archaeological site for military purposes, mobilizing it and storing weapons in it. When the Houthis controlled the castle until September 2016, they bombed the city of Taiz from within the castle. After the resistance controlled the castle in September 2016, the castle was also used to bomb the positions of Ansar Allah (Houthis) strongholds on the outskirts of the city.

From May 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Mwatana documented the targeting of the castle by the Arab coalition warplanes with 22 bombs during 12 air strikes.

Due to the bombardment of the castle and its use for military purposes for nearly three years, it is very likely in danger of collapsing.

## ■ Tarek, (a pseudonym), (30 years old)

was an eyewitness to what happened to the castle during this war. Tarek said: “At the beginning of the war, the Houthis took control of the Al Qahirah Castle for a year, and the castle was shelled by the resistance from their strongholds in Mudhaffar and Bab Moussa. In September 2016, the resistance took control of the castle. After the Houthis withdrew to the outskirts of the city and to the West, they targeted it with artillery shells and tanks, which caused great damage.”

Tarek went on to compare between the destruction of the Al Qahirah Castle as a result of artillery and tank fires, with the destruction caused by the airstrikes of the Arab Coalition. He said that the coalition planes are probably causing the greatest damage. As for the airstrikes, Tarek said: “At 11 am, on Sah’ban 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1437 AH or May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the Arab Coalition fighters targeted the Al Qahirah Castle with the first air strike and fired about 7 rockets. Two hours later, the coalition fired 2 bombs as well, which led to the complete destruction of substantial parts of the castle, in particular the upper part. The coalition continued to target the castle from that day and until Sha’ban 7<sup>th</sup> or May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016, almost on a daily basis. During that period, the coalition launched 12 air strikes, with about 22 bombs.”

Tarek concluded his testimony by elaborating on the status of the castle following the withdrawal of Ansar Allah (Houthis) and the control of the resistance fighters. “After the withdrawal of the Houthis and after the resistance took control, the castle was under the control of the fighters of the Islah Party. Clashes erupted between Al Islah and the Salafis over the control of the castle and the Salafis led by Abu Abbas won. The location of Al Qahirah Castle is very strategic and whoever controls it can control the city of Taiz<sup>(86)</sup>. In sum, the castle, which was rehabilitated during 13 years, and with huge amounts of money dedicated for its rehabilitation, was destroyed in the blink of an eye<sup>(87)</sup>”.

## ■ Othman, (a pseudonym) (45 years old)

is another eyewitness to what happened to the ancient Al Qahirah Castle in Taiz. Othman said: “I am a resident of the neighborhood, and I was a witness to the targeting of the castle by the coalition aircraft, which caused great damage, destroyed the upper part completely and caused serious damage to the lower part. The popular resistance also targeted the castle from its positions in the center of the city of Taiz since the beginning of the war in 2015, before the castle came under the control of the resistance in September 2016 - Al Islah faction, and then, the Abu Abbas faction.”

(86) <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/2018/1/13/%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AC-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D8%B9%D8%B2-%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B7-%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%88%D9%83-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%87%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A>

(87) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, February 12th, 2017.



Othman concluded his testimony with a retrospective view of the status of the archaeological castle during the reigns of President Ibrahim al-Hamdi and President Ali Abdullah Saleh. “In 1976, President Ibrahim al-Hamdi built a wall around the castle and the old city and prevented construction in the area next to it. He also declared it a historical monument. Then, under the reign of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, the upper part of the castle was used as headquarters for the stern of the Republican Guard, while the lower part was used as a park for the people of Taiz, who can no longer find since the beginning of the war one outlet not visited by death”.<sup>(88)</sup>

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(88) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, February 12th, 2017.

# Salh Castle Taiz

“Salh” is an ancient archaeological region, located to the east of the city of Taiz, and has some ancient monuments dating back to the reign of the Rasulid Dynasty. Also located in the area is the Salh Palace, built by Imam Ahmad bin Yahya Hamidaddin (1904 -September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1962), the penultimate imam of the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen.

The castle was built in the form of a fortress surrounded by a stone wall. Before today's ongoing war, it housed a small museum with a collection of ancient antiquities and some relics dating back to the Islamic era. The museum also contains exhibits of traditional craft products used in the last centuries of the second millennium. In addition, the Castle's Museum contained a collection of documents related to the most important internal and external events that had an impact on the modern and contemporary history of Yemen, which helped it gain great value among researchers, foreign tourists and visitors.



■ Salah castle – Taiz      by: Ahmed al-Basha

With the beginning of the current war, the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) and the forces of its former ally Saleh turned the castle into a military barracks and a site for their military operations, according to information provided by eyewitnesses. As a result, the area was closed and branded as a military zone. Checkpoints were established in the vicinity of the castle and the surrounding area, the nearest one being only 50 meters away from the castle. Since November 2016, the Popular Resistance and the army forces loyal to President Hadi have taken control of the vicinity of the Salh Castle and Tabbat al-Mukalkal from the west and southeast of the Salh district. As for the directions facing the palace from the north and the north-east, they remained areas of contact between the parties.

Nearly seven months after the fighters of Ansar Allah (Houthis) and the forces of their former ally, Saleh captured the Salh Castle, the forces of the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates launched their first airstrikes on the castle. This was at 11:30 am on Thursday, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, followed by other air strikes on different days, resulting in the complete destruction of the castle.

The Mwatana team was not able to get close to the destroyed archaeological site and photograph it, because the military checkpoint established by the storm brigade of the army loyal to President Hadi prevented the team from getting to the castle. The checkpoint was about 800 meters from the castle. The team was stopped from reaching the castle because of the continuous clashes and shelling at the time.

- **Sadek Ali Al Mehya is the deputy director general of tourism in the governorate of Taiz. He also gave the following testimony concerning what happened to the castle during this war:**

“Since they first controlled the city of Taiz in late March 2015, the Houthi group and Saleh forces turned the Salh Castle and its surrounding area into a military barracks and a military supply depot. They deployed armored vehicles and machinery in the vicinity of the castle, the Salh Valley line and the line leading to the area of Hassanat, Sabir Al Mawadim and Zayl’i - Dimnat; since the castle is located close to the Mukalkal camp used by the Houthi group to bomb the city. As the popular resistance and the national army advanced in mid-August 2015 and took control of the eastern neighborhoods of the city, the Houthis began to bombard these neighborhoods from all locations: Salh Castle, Mukalkal, and al-Silal Tabba. As the Houthis increased their attacks on the villages of Hassanat, Sabir Al Mawadim and Al-Moujliya neighborhoods from these sites, especially from the vicinity of Salh Castle, the nearest site to the villages of Mountain Sabr, the coalition forces began targeting the castle and its surroundings. The coalition aircraft carried out its first operations against the castle and its surroundings around 11:30 am on Thursday, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015, with two airstrikes. These two strikes destroyed the entire main building of the palace and its annexes: the garden and the shazrawan, damaging the buildings and houses adjacent to the palace, including the communications building. The stones of the palace building flew over a wide range of up to 300 meters, causing damage to many neighboring houses.”

As for the contents of the palace, Al Mehya said: “There were many artimethod, historical manuscripts and antiquities in the castle. They were damaged as a result of the destruction of the castle and the rest of the relics that were intact were taken by the Houthi fighters from inside the palace to an unknown destination<sup>(89)</sup>.”

He also added: “The castle was an important tourist destination, and with its destruction, the governorate of Taiz lost the financial resources it used to provide. Furthermore, many of the residents of the area lost their homes, all of whom moved to other areas or were displaced because of they lost their families, homes or jobs. The shelling and the war caused a general state of terror and fear among the people of Taiz in general, and the residents of the Salh area in particular. This area is considered as a major artery for many areas including: Sabir Al Mawadim, Hassanat and Zayl’i - Dimnat Khadir. The residents of these areas were affected by the cutting off of the main road, which provided them with basic materials, especially as most of them depended on transportation work (taxis) as their main source of income. The farmers from the Salh district were no longer able to work in the field of agriculture on which they depended to secure their livelihood. These events have also affected the social fabric and caused its rupture, which will be difficult to deal with over the next decade, because the damage is large and multifaceted.”

(89) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Sadek Al Mehya, March 15th,



# Al Sinnara Citadel in the A'abla' Site Sa'ada

Al-Sinnara Citadel or the Citadel of Imam Al-Hadi Sharaf Eddin was built in 1880<sup>(90)</sup>, in the Rahban-Al Abbedin area, about 10 kilometers away to south of the city of Sa'ada. It is considered one of the most important archeological and touristic citadels and monuments in Sa'ada Governorate. In the 1930s and 1940s, Imam Yahya Hamid ed-Din, and later his son Ahmed, used it as a prison for political opponents<sup>(91)</sup>.

Due to its historical importance and its location on the top of All-A'abla' mountain, overlooking the city of Sa'ada to the north, the residents of the region considered the ancient site of Al-'A'abla an attraction for tourists and their families, who could go on a stroll and engage in leisure activities and families.

After the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) seized the governorate of Sa'ada in mid-2011, they took control of Al-A'abla' mountain and used the citadel as a military site starting from July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Because the site overlooks the Dammaj area, which is located about 1.5 kilometers to the south; Ansar Allah (Houthis) used this location in their war with the group of Sheikh Yehya Ali Alhjour (Salafists).

On October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the Arab coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE bombed the communications towers on top of Al-A'abla' mountain, causing minor damages to the historic citadel.

The Mwatana team was unable to take close-up pictures of the damage caused to the fortress citadel of because the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) had established a point for them under the archaeological site from the north-west and a military site as well on the mountain top near the archaeological buildings.

(90) Ahmad Jaber Afif et al., op. cit., p. 529.

(91) Same

■ **Abdallah, (a pseudonym), (45 years old), is an eyewitness to the targeting of the historic citadel of Al Sinnara and he lives in the neighboring area.**

In his testimony given to Mwatana concerning this incident, Abdallah said<sup>(92)</sup>:

“On Monday, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the coalition air forces launched a raid against the Al-A’abla’ mountain and targeted the communications towers of “Yemen Mobile”, “Sabafone” and “MTN”, which are located approximately 50 meters away from the historic citadel. The raid caused minor damages to the citadel due to shrapnel. A week later, the anti-aircraft machine on the eastern side of the mountain, which is about 70 meters away from the citadel, was targeted by an air strike carried out by coalition air forces at around 4:00 am. The shrapnel reached the citadel, as well as the surrounding area to my house. These two airstrikes caused a disruption of the communications network but thankfully, nobody was hurt. However, the ensuing fear and panic, especially among children and women, caused some people to flee their homes near the site, fearing that it would be bombed again. About five months ago, many of these families returned<sup>(93)</sup>.”

■ **Maher, (a pseudonym), (41 years old), is an eyewitness who lives next to the historic Al Sinnara site. Concerning this incident, Maher said the following in his testimony:**

“At dawn on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015, I was sleeping in my house in Rahban and woke up to the sound of a loud explosion. I went up to the roof of the house and noticed that aircrafts were still flying in the area, while the dust and the smell of gunpowder came from the side of the citadel. I wanted to call one of the neighbors but the connections were cut off. In the morning, I saw the site and the damage caused by the shelling; the flying shrapnel and stones left their traces on the walls of the citadel. The communications networks stopped and one of the cell towers of “Yemen Mobile” company fell completely. After a few days, the networks were repaired, except for “Yemen Mobile” because the tower was completely destroyed and fell on the side of the mountain. The aircrafts kept on flying over for about half an hour, while the anti-aircraft machine, which had been installed near the citadel, was firing into the air before the situation calmed down.<sup>(94)</sup>”

(92) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, January 18th, 2017.

(93) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, January 19th, 2017.

(94) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, January 20th, 2017.

# Al-Qefel Site

## Sa'ada

The historic Al-Qefel building was built during the rule of Imam Yahya Hamid ed-Din (1904-1948) in the Saqayn District in the Sa'ada Governorate. The building is more like a military garrison. During his rule (1948-1962), Imam Ahmad used it as a prison for his opponents. Its location is strategic since it overlooks the city of Saqayn from the east, which is about 30 km from the capital of the Sa'ada governorate. There are several government buildings near the building: transportation department, general hospital of Saqayn and security department. All in all, the building served as a military fortress before it

became the headquarters for government officials and a prison.

After the revolution of September 26<sup>th</sup>, 1962, which ended the regime of the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen (1918-1962), the building remained abandoned for some time, before being inhabited by some Al-Bashar sheikhs from the region. In 2002, during the tenure of the governor Yahya al-Amri, the building was restored and used it as the headquarters for the local authority in the district. It remained as is until the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) attacked and besieged it, including the members of the army and security department. This happened when the group's militants took control of the Saqayn district in 2009, before the sixth war of Sa'ada<sup>(95)</sup>. It was used by the group for military purposes and as a prison for its opponents. At the beginning of the sixth war, on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009, the Yemeni air forces bombed the building, destroying its southern part. In June 2016, air strikes were carried out by the Arab coalition air forces, led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Then, the remaining ornate wood and fine stones were stolen.

(95) For details on the wars waged by the Houthis against the regime of President Ali Abdullah Saleh, which took place between (2004-2009), visit the following link: <http://almoheet.net/%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A8-%D8%B5%D8%B9%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%AA/>

- **Abdul Kareem (35 years old), (a pseudonym), is an eyewitness who spoke to Mwatana about the damages that the Al-Qefel site sustained. Abdul Kareem said:**

“Since 2006, the historic Al-Qefel site has been used by the security department and the army. After the Houthi group entered and seized the site in 2009, they turned it into a prison and their headquarters. On the night of Wednesday, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the building was hit by two air strikes, only five minutes apart. The two airstrikes damaged the historic site, leaving only the mosque and some rooms standing<sup>(96)</sup>.”

- **Khaled (44 years), (a pseudonym), is also another eyewitness from the residents of the area. He gave the following testimony concerning the same incident:**

“The site was the headquarters of the local authority and was restored during the mandate of Yahya al-Amri in 2006. It was used by the army before the entry of the Houthi group to the region and then it was struck by the Yemeni aviation in the sixth war in 2009. As a result, some rooms and the top of the Kasbah in its southern part were moderately damaged. On Wednesday, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016, it was hit by two successive airstrikes launched by the Arab Coalition, which destroyed what was left of it. Only the mosque and several rooms remained standing. Since then, contractual system employees have lost their jobs<sup>(97)</sup>.”

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(96) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, February 1st, 2017.

(97) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, February 3rd, 2017.



# Touristic Pier

## Aden

The touristic pier, known as the Wells Pier, was one of the facilities built by the British Government in April 1919, during its occupation of the city of Aden (1839-1967). The pier was built near the entrance to Aden's main port, to meet the growing tourist traffic in Aden. The tourists were transported by private boats to and from the pier. It was also used as a service pier, through which seafarers and supplied were transported, as well as a marina for yachts and tourist attractions<sup>(98)</sup>.

The pier is located in Al-Benjassar area in the Attawahi District in Aden Governorate and its minimum depth is four meters. The pier is characterized by the durability of its walls and its solid construction; since it was built with shamsani stone (relative to Shamsan Mountain). It also has a beautiful style, and an impressive scarlet roof, which mimics the construction model of the Indian port of Bombay.



■ Touristic Pier in before the war – Aden

by: Ibrahim al-Yunisi

(98) <http://www.portofaden.net/APassengerTerminal.aspx>

The touristic pier was attacked several times, which led to its destruction. This happened during the war in Aden in early 2015, between the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) and their former ally Saleh on the one hand, and the popular resistance in the city and the Arab coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the other hand.



■ *Touristic Pier after the war*      *by: Saleh Bahulais*

- **Maher Mahfouz Abdulatif (30 years old) was an eyewitness to the destruction of the pier, since he is a resident of the area where the pier is located. Maher's following testimony summarizes what happened to this site:**

“After the Houthis and the forces of former President Saleh controlled Attawahi District in May 2015, most of the residents of my neighborhood, including my family, were displaced. I stayed at home to guard it and I did not want to leave. The Houthis positioned themselves in the port of Aden, specifically in the administration building and the touristic pier. After a while, we heard the sound of fire coming from heavy weapons and we felt the entire area shake. It turned out that the Houthis had a rocket launcher (Katyusha) at the top of the mountain and they were firing rockets at the parts they couldn't control from the city. After a while, we saw the rocket launcher in the park of the port and pier. The sound of Katyusha rockets being launched was very strong. In the middle or at the end of the month of Ramadan (July) 2015, the historic pier was targeted by the Arab Coalition forces with a missile that destroyed it. The roof and two of its façades were destroyed, and the other two façades are about to fall<sup>(99)</sup>.”

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(99) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Maher Mahfouz, May 2016.





# **Chapter IV**

## **Religious Monuments**



# Al-Hadi Mosque

## Sa'ada

Al-Imam Al-Hadi Mosque is one of the mosques of the historic city of Sa'ada. It was built around the year 290 AH/897 AD, and was named after Imam Yahya Bin Al-Hussein, nicknamed Guide to Justice (Al Hadi ila Al Haq), founder of the Ziyadid Dynasty in Yemen<sup>(100)</sup>. The mosque consists of an open courtyard in the center surrounded by four corridors, the deepest of which is the qibla hallway. It can be accessed through thirteen doors and has two main minarets. The larger minaret is located in the courtyard and is among the tallest in Yemen, reaching around 52 meters high, while the second minaret is smaller and is located in the southern part of the courtyard<sup>(101)</sup>.



■ *AL Hadi Mosque – Sa'da* by: *Ahmed al-Basha*

(100) Ahmad Jaber Afif et al., op. cit., p. 1018.

(101) Ahmad Zakaria: The Mosques of Yemen: Their Establishment, Evolution and Specificities Abadi Center for Studies and Publications, 1998.

The mosque has a great religious and historical status, especially among the followers of the Ziyadid sect, who consider it as a shrine, since it houses the mausoleum of Imam Hadi. On the other hand, the mosque is the Ziyadid main headquarters and reference school of thought. In this school, religion and language sciences are taught, and seminars, lectures and workshops of a religious nature are held. The mosque also has a library containing many ancient religious and historical books, and is accessible to many so-called “immigrants” and drop outs that are in search of education.

In late 2011, the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) took control of Sa’ada governorate. Soon after, the group invaded the Al-Hadi archaeological mosque, assigned a guard room, and searched the people entering the mosque at its eastern gate.

At 4:30 pm on Saturday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the Arab coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates launched an air strike that hit a number of shops selling clothes and janabi (Yemeni daggers) next to the mosque. At 9:30 the following day, coalition aircrafts launched a second raid that destroyed all the commercial shops in the square adjacent to the mosque and the water project. The mosque and the façades of surrounding houses and shops were damaged. Following these two attacks, all the shops inside the city moved out of the city, in particular to the neighborhood of the Saudi Al Salam Hospital.

It was not possible for the Mwatana team to take close-up pictures of the site targeted by the two air strikes, because the Ansar Allah (Houthis) militants were stationed under the site from the north-west, and the military site of the group was also established on the mountain overlooking the archaeological site.

■ **Yassin, (a pseudonym), (38 years old) is an eyewitness who spoke with Mwatana about these two incidents. He said:**

“At approximately 4:30 pm on Saturday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, coalition aircrafts launched a raid targeting shops selling janabi and clothing and the water project adjacent to the Imam Al-Hadi mosque in Bab al-Yemen in the old city of Sa’ada. At around 10 am on the following day, the same place was targeted with a second raid.”

Yassin added: “When the first raid took place, only my brother and I were in our house because our children and women had been displaced to Dammaj. Most of the residents of the city were displaced at the time because of the intensifying airstrikes outside the wall (Bab al-Yemen), the government complex and the Al-Dobbat neighborhood in the northern part of the city... The airstrikes intensified against military camps, and people were apprehensive after the official spokesman for the military forces led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE warned in a statement the residents of Sa’ada. At the time of the first raid, my brother went up to the roof to see where the raid had hit. He thought it was close, or in our neighborhood, because we could see and feel the dust in the wind. So, he thought the strike was next to us. I went up to the roof and said to him: The raid hit the Al-Hadi Mosque from the west. Honestly, we were scared, because the city had become almost empty and planes continued flying and bombing here and there<sup>(102)</sup>.”

Concerning the targeting of the Al-Hadi Mosque, Yassin said: “The shelling of the mosque and its surrounding area is provoking the people, particularly the residents of Sa’ada because it is an Islamic archeological landmark. On the second day, we returned to the house to take some of the remaining objects. Initially, we had expected the shelling to calm or subside. When my brother, my wife and I were carrying our things to the car, the second strike hit at about 10 am. I was standing next to the car as it was shaking. My wife shouted as she walked out of the door and threw the mattresses over her. Because of the shaking resulting from the force of the blast, I expected the raid to be close. My brother ran toward us and urged us to leave immediately, fearing that the shelling will start again. My wife was really scared. I told my brother to calm down and we waited for half an hour, during which the flying subsided. So we took off and went back to Dammaj. When we passed through Bab al-Yemen, we saw the effects of the raid that hit next to the first raid’s target. The houses were more damaged and shrapnel and stones reached Bab al-Yemen. The people in general in Sa’ada governorate were severely affected and the city in particular. People lost their homes and sources of income, and as you can see, all the shops and markets inside the city are still closed.”

Yassin recalled the living situation of the residents of the Sa’ada governorate since the beginning of the military intervention of the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Yemen and said: “At the beginning of the war, the situation was so tragic that visitors did not believe that this was a city. The women would run out to the street afraid

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(102) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, February 5th, 2017.

and terrified and maybe only God knows the extent of their fear. The shelling hit the center Al Markazi, next to the wall and most of the areas surrounding the wall from the inside and outside, and the mausoleum inside the city. The situation was tense in most areas of Sa'ada. Some people did not know where to move and the situation of people was bad. Gas and oil were lacking and the price of an oil barrel (20 liters) in those days went up to 25000 riyals, about ten times its normal price. May these days never return. Now, thank God, the bombing eased, the situation calmed down, the shops opened outside the city, and shop owners inside the city opened shops in the street of Al Salam hospital and the surrounding area.”

■ **Sadek (41 years old), (a pseudonym as well), is another eyewitness to the targeting of the archeological mosque of Al-Hadi in Sa'ada.**

Sadek said:

“The Al-Hadi Mosque was targeted by two airstrikes carried out by the Arab coalition aircrafts. The first raid occurred on Saturday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, at Bab al-Yemen in the old city of Sa'ada, while the second one was launched the following day. The two airstrikes did not hit the mosque directly; they fell near it, about 3 meters east of it. These two airstrikes destroyed all the small shops and water project, with only the high cement tank surviving the raid. The façades of the shops located to the south and north in the outskirts of the square, were damaged and their doors were broken. As for the shops in the center of the square next to the mosque, they were completely destroyed and totally collapsed. I went out and saw that Bab al-Yemen was the target of the strike, and the square near the Al-Hadi mosque was covered with shrapnel and debris. The smell of gunpowder was all over the place. You could hide two cars in the hole left by that raid. The southern façade was damaged; the walls and doors of shops and houses from the south-west were partially destroyed, and the wall of the mosque was damaged and was full of shrapnel.”



# Al-Maatbiya Mosque

## Taiz

The Al-Maatbiya Mosque (the Al-Maatbiya Madrassa) is the third largest mosque in the ancient city of Taiz, after the Mudhaffar and Al-Ashrafiya mosques and it is located to the west of Al-Ashrafiya Mosque, in the Al-Ashrafiya neighborhood, in the administrative branch of the Mudhaffar district - Taiz governorate. It was built by “Jihat Al-Tawashi”<sup>(103)</sup>, Jamal Eddine Maatab bint Abdullah al-Ashrafi, wife of Sultan Al-Ashraf Ismail bin Al-Afdal, who died in 796 AH/1393 AD.

The Madrassa consists of an open courtyard surrounded by four corridors, the deepest of which is the qibla hallway, which is covered by six domes embellished from the inside.

The main entrance of the mosque is located on the southern side, and a number of annexes<sup>(104)</sup> were added to it.

At 11 am on Wednesday, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Al-Maatbiya was subjected to a serious violation represented in the shelling of the northern façade of the school with a tank shell launched by the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) and the forces of Saleh, causing damage to its wall from the top.

(103) “Al-Tawashi” is a term used to refer to the soldiers of the princes, i.e., their guards. Their main function is to serve the houses of the sultan and his harem. Thus, the Al-Tawashi in the era of the Rasulid Dynasty is attributed to the honorable woman because the Al-Tawashi serves her and might start events in her name. The term “Jihat” is a Seljuk-Turkic term that is attributed to a woman of great merit, especially if she is the wife, sister or mother of the Sultan. The title may be associated with the title “Dar” or “Adar”, Jihat Al-Tawashi X. The term “AL-Tawashi” and “Jihat” precede the name of the father or the person whom the women is attributed to from the eunuchs Al-Tawashi. In our time, this term corresponds to the meaning of “harem”, which is said to avoid mentioning the name of women out of politeness in our time. (Al Warf: The Light of Knowledge in the Regulations, Laws and Customs of Yemen in the Mudhaffar Era, investigation: Mohammad Abdul Rahim Jazem, French Institute of Archeology and Social Sciences, Sana’a, 2003, p. 525. Abdul Rahman Abdul Wahid Al-Shujaa: The Seljuk Effect on Yemen until the middle of the 9th century AH/15th century AD, Al-Eklil Magazine, Issues 37 and 38, 2010, p. 12).

(104) Al-Khazraji: Pearly Contracts in the History of the Rasulid Dynasty, V2, p.209. Taiz Governorate: Taiz, Civilization and Presence, 2010, p. 202.

- **Sadek Ali Al Mehya (42 years old) is the deputy director general of tourism in the governorate of Taiz. He also gave the following testimony concerning this incident:**

“On Wednesday, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015, before noon, the Al-Maatbiya Madrassa was shelled by a tank, which caused damage to the Madrassa’s wall from the northern side. There was no armed presence in the site and the Madrassa wasn’t being used for military purposes. The shell was fired from the headquarters of the General People’s Congress, east of the city, which overlooks the Madrassa and is about 1-1.3 kilometers away. At that time, the General People’s Congress’ headquarters were being used by the elite guard forces and the Houthi group. From there, they would fire artillery shells (BMD) present in the backyard of the congress, aimed at the western, northwestern and southern neighborhoods of the city.”

He added: “This attack was preceded by other attacks against archaeological sites in the old city, carried out by the Houthi group and the forces of Saleh. There were no casualties among civilians, but they caused damage to the Madrassa and the house adjacent to it, and intimidated the safe residents of the neighborhood. They also led to the displacement of the population living in the surrounding area. Additionally, we would hear about sporadic shelling in different parts of the neighborhoods of the city. After the shelling that hit the Madrassa, it wasn’t bombed again<sup>(105)</sup>.”

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(105) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Sadek AL Mehya, March 2nd, 2017.

# Al-Ashrafiya Mosque and Madrassa

Al-Ashrafiya Mosque and Madrassa is one of the most famous and largest mosques in Yemen. It was built in the city of Taiz, on the foot of Mount Sabr in the southwestern part of the city (currently the Mudhaffar district). Some Musnad scripts on its walls indicate that its construction was commissioned by Sultan Ashraf bin Abbas.

The construction of Al-Ashrafiya Mosque started in 1275 AD and it was opened in 1382 AD during the peak of the Rasulid dynasty (1229 – 1454 AD). It is considered to be one of the most important religious schools in the Islamic history of Yemen.

In addition to the prayer hall, the mosque is attached with a madrassa and the shrines of a number of the Rasulid sultans. It is considered as one of the most beautiful mosques in Taiz, along with Mudhaffar Mosque. When this historic landmark was receiving crowds of foreign tourists, the people of the region specialized in a number of trades that contributed to improving their incomes and their standards of living.

However, this archaeological landmark was not spared from the fire of the war, as it was hit by an unexpected artillery shell launched by Ansar Allah group (Houthis) and the forces of their former ally Saleh, against the neighborhood of Al-Ashrafiya. The artillery shell hit the eastern lighthouse of the Al-Ashrafiya Mosque in June 2015, causing severe damage.

- **Sadek Ali Ali Al Mehya (42 years old) is the deputy director general of tourism in the governorate of Taiz and he was a witness to this incident. He said the following:**

“On Wednesday, June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015, at 4:30, the eastern minaret of the historic Al-Ashrafiya Mosque was suddenly bombed. No clashes had occurred before the shelling and the mosque wasn’t used as a military station by the resistance or any other group, since it is surrounded by a number of locations that overlook the old city. At that time, the armed fighters of the Houthi group and Saleh were controlling these sites, while the resistance and the Abu Abbas Brigades were still being formed and weren’t stationed in any location near the mosque. We were surprised when the mosque was targeted with an artillery shell that shook the entire neighborhood surrounding the mosque and shattered the windows of the houses adjacent to the mosque. As for the mosque’s minaret, it was visibly damaged by the shell in its middle section and was cracked. The shell was fired from the east, where the security department is located, at the fourth point (Swedish Hospital), which is located about 800 meters from the mosque. During that period, the Houthi group and Saleh’s forces were stationed there.”

While Al Mehya said that the attack did not result in casualties among the population, he stated that it “caused the displacement of the majority of the residents of the neighborhood.” He also added that “this attack spread fear and panic in our hearts and the hearts of the residents living in the surrounding area. This war caused tourists and visitors to stop coming to the city’s archaeological sites, which led to the interruption of the incomes of craftsmen and their products that were offered to the visitors of the region<sup>(106)</sup>.”

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(106) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Sadek Al Mehya, February 4th, 2017.



# The Mudhaffar Mosque

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## Taiz

The construction of the Mudhaffar Mosque and Madrassa in the city of Taiz is attributed to the King Mudhaffar Youssef bin Omar bin Ali bin Rasul, the second monarch of the Rasulid dynasty, who reigned from 647 to 694 AH/1249-1294 AD

Historians say that the mosque was founded during the first half of the reign of King Mudhaffar (648 AH/1250 AD), while the Sultan Amir bin Abd al-Wahhab, founder of the Tahirid dynasty, between (858 and 923 AH), built the domes of the mosque, known as Al-Amiriya domes. Some additions and modifications were made to the mosque during the following centuries, including the construction of a new minaret of the mosque

at its eastern end in the 1980s.<sup>(107)</sup>

The Mudhaffar Mosque is one of the most prominent religious and historical landmarks of the city of Taiz. The mosque is located in a neighborhood bearing its name, in the heart of the city of Taiz, sometimes called the Old City. After the administrative division that included dividing the cities into districts, one of the three districts in the city was named Mudhaffar. The Mudhaffar District has three of the most prominent historical religious monuments, with a unique construction dating back to more than a thousand years, and is associated with great spiritual value among the inhabitants of the city of Taiz:

1. The Mudhaffar Mosque and Madrassa
2. Al-Ashrafiya Mosque and Madrassa
3. Al-Maatbiya Mosque and Madrassa.

Nearly 100m away from the Mudhaffar Mosque, there is a military gathering at the Ha'el Educational Complex for Girls, which is being used as a military barrack and media center for the Abu Abbas faction. Mwatana documented an artillery bombardment by the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) and the forces of former President Saleh, targeting the Mudhaffar Mosque on Sunday, July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

(107) Faysal Saiid Fare': Taiz... The Unique, Al Saiid Institution for Science, 2012, p. 208.

■ **In his testimony, Abdul Karim Kassem Mohammad Hammoud (30 years old) who is an eyewitness and a resident of the neighborhood said**

he was surprised to hear a loud explosion at 11:30 pm on Sunday, July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016. He added: “I was chatting with some neighbors when we heard a very loud explosion. Simultaneously, we saw a red flash, and then smoke emanating from the Mudhaffar Mosque. We ran and started looking for a safe place to hide. We were expecting other strikes to follow. When I saw the residents of the neighborhood run towards the mosque, I went out and followed them to see what had happened. Thankfully, nobody was hurt. There was a small group of people inside the mosque but the shell fell in a room located far from where they were. The mosque is quite spacious. I can’t really describe it and the room but I can say the mosque is large. We then identified the missile as a Katyucha rocket by examining its debris and then the resistance men in the area came and took it.”<sup>(108)</sup>

When asked if the Mudhaffar Mosque had been attacked before, Abdul Karim confirmed it by saying: “Before this incident, the mosque had been attacked several times by anti-aircraft fire but it sustained minor damages. As for this shell, it caused a big hole in one of the mosque’s wall. The neighborhood’s young people cooperated together to rehabilitate it.”

The Muezzin of the Mudhaffar Mosque, Ahmad Ghaleb Abdi Ahmad (56 years old) briefly described this incident: “I was in my house, near the mosque, when the explosion occurred and the sky lit up with red flashes. I went outside and saw a lot of smoke coming from the mosque. I thought that the people inside the mosque had died but thankfully the shell fell in a room that was far away from them. Nobody got hurt but the rocket caused moderate damages to the walls of the mosque, in addition to a hole and some cracks that we were able to repair.”<sup>(109)</sup>

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(108) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Abdul Kareem Kassem Mahmoud, February 12th, 2017.

(109) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Ahmad Ghaleb, February 9th, 2017.

# Mosque of Abdulhadi al-Sudi and its Dome

## Taiz

The mosque of Abdulhadi al-Sudi is located in a quarter carrying its name within the Mudhaffar neighborhood in the city of Taiz, on the western side of the Old City. The Sufi mosque and zawiyat were founded by the Yemeni Sheikh Abu Abdullah Abdulhadi al-Sudi from Taiz (860-932 AH / 1450-1525 AD). Sheikh Abdulhadi was a writer and a judge, and when he died, he was buried in a place adjacent to his mosque where he used to teach and then a dome was erected over his tomb<sup>(110)</sup>.

The mosque was also known as the Al Mashannah Mosque and some additions were incorporated during the first phase of the Ottoman presence. Other additions were made as well at the end of the second phase of the Ottoman presence by Sheikh Muhammad Muqbel. As for the

mausoleum, it was considered one of the most important mystical monuments in Yemen. It is the tomb of one of the Sufi preachers with a high standing, especially among the people of Taiz, in addition to being one of the monuments visited by tourists in the prewar period<sup>(111)</sup>.

The mosque and the mausoleum are located in the western part of the old city, which contains a number of historical and archaeological monuments. The area is currently under the control of the Abu Abbas Brigades, which are stationed in the Ha'el Educational Complex for Girls that is located about 500 meters away from the mosque to the north-east side. The ancient Al Qahirah Castle is located above the Sudi Dome from the south-eastern side (about 650 meters), while the Al-Maatbiya Mosque and Al-Ashrafiya Mosque (about 250 meters) are located to the east (about 100 meters).

On July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the Abdulhadi al-Sudi's dome was blown up with dynamite by extremist elements affiliated with Ansar al-Sharia group.

Mwatana was able to visit and photograph the site on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 but was only able to meet one witness because of the deployment of armed fighters from the Abu Abbas Brigades.

(110) Abdul Aziz Al Mansub: Subject (S) in the Yemeni Encyclopedia, V. 3, E. 2003, p. 1634.

(111) Same source.

## ■ Samir, (a pseudonym), (42 years old)

was the only eyewitness who agreed to talk with Mwatana's team. At first, Samir confirmed that the Abdulhadi al-Sudi mosque and dome were archeological and historic monuments that attracted tourists and made "decent returns" for the district's treasury. Then, he detailed the incident of how this historic landmark was blown up;

"On the evening of Friday, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016, at 9:00 pm, the armed group "Ansar al-Sharia" affiliated with Al-Qaeda came to the Abdulhadi quarter in the Mudhaffar district on board 2 black "Chasse" vehicles and planted explosive devices with dynamite in the surrounding of the historic Sheikh Abdulhadi al-Sudi mosque and dome, which is also called Al Takwiya Mosque and Madrassa. Afterwards, they blew it up completely and dug up some graves in the cemetery adjacent to the mosque, under the pretext that visiting this shrine and mausoleum is considered an act of blasphemy and atheism. The explosion caused damage to a number of houses and buildings, most of which are old, that were adjacent to the mosque and close to it. The explosion caused panic and fear among the inhabitants of the neighborhood and the city in general. Every standing and strong edifice in the old city started to shake because of the high intensity of the explosion. It was even heard in most of the neighborhoods of the city of Taiz. The mosque's guard Hajj Ali Muhammad Abu Asbaa, a blind sheikh who was standing next to the wall of the mosque was killed. He was wounded by shrapnel that hit him in the head and face, and he died the next day in the Al Thawra General Hospital. Four of the armed fighters who blew up the mausoleum were also injured but there is no information about their fate or where they were treated."<sup>(112)</sup>

Samir continued by describing the explosion, the moments preceding it and the reaction of the neighborhood's resident toward the destruction of this archeological monument: "The mausoleum was blown up without any warning to the residents of the area. When the gunmen arrived in their vehicles, most of the people were wondering why they were there, but no one dared to ask them. When they brought a wooden box out of the vehicles with them, everyone began to have suspicions, especially that the mosque was located among random houses. In addition to the loud sound of the explosion, the sky was filled with dust and smoke that increased the fear and panic among the people. Stones were flying in the air because of the explosion and caused injuries in a large part of the neighborhood. Shrapnel also caused damage to water tanks and solar panels, and the windows of houses close to the blast.

About 20 minutes after the explosion, the cloud formed by the explosion started to subside, and the vision started to become clear. It was a great shock to us residents of the old city, because the mausoleum and the mosque had a great religious place for most of the people of the city. This incident caused a state of resentment and frustration among the residents. The following morning, large numbers of people from Taiz came to see the

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(112) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, February 4th, 2017.



consequences of the explosion. That day, the situation was very tense, and the Abu Abbas Brigades were deployed immediately after the explosion, in anticipation of any reaction by the people or those coming to the region. In the evening, shots were fired in the air, with the aim of preventing any gatherings or stopping people from approaching the site. Not only did the elements of al-Qaeda blow up archaeological sites in the region, but they also committed their violations in several sites that are under the control of the Abu Abbas Brigades, which were silent and did not protect these sites.”

# Al Rumaymeh Dome

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## Taiz

Al Rumaymeh Dome is located in the village of At Turbah in the Mashra'a Wa Hadnan District in the Governorate of Taiz. Its construction dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AH and was commissioned by Sheikh Ali bin Ahmed Al-Rumaymeh, who built it as a religious school. The dome has an important historical and religious status among the people of the Mashra'a Wa Hadnan District, as it was a religious school where many religious scholars studied. This increased its importance among the residents of the village. At an earlier time, the dome was a shrine to religious people, as well as a historical and archaeological landmark

frequented by visitors from the city of Taiz and other cities, as well as foreign tourists. It was an archaeological station for historians and researchers interested in history and archeology; it contained many valuable books and carved inscriptions on the doors.

The area, in which the dome of Al Rumaymeh is located, is rural and mountainous, and located within the district of Jabal Sabr. At its northern entrance, a pro-Hadi army post has been established and was about 800 meters away from the archaeological site. On the southern side, there is a checkpoint of the Popular Resistance, about 500 meters away from the archaeological site. Additionally, the headquarters of the army and popular resistance loyal to President Hadi was in the village was about 300 meters to the west of the dome.

The residents of the region depend mainly on khat cultivation. It is one of the areas of Taiz governorate, whose residents joined in considerable numbers the resistance and the army loyal to President Hadi. The carrying of weapons constitutes a phenomenon among the people, and the walls of the village houses still have the marks of the clashes that took place between the residents of the village and the district who joined the ranks of the popular resistance on the one hand, and the supporters of Ansar Allah (the Houthis) and Al-Rumaymeh on the other hand. During their talks with Mwatana, many residents of the village considered that the dome is one of the remnants of the Shiite and Houthi tide in the region.

Since late August 2015, the area has been under the control of the army loyal to President Hadi and the Popular Resistance, and was the only outlet for the city of Taiz during its siege by the Ansar Allah group (Houthis).

At 12:30 am on Friday night, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017, Sheikh Ali bin Ahmed al-Rumaymeh's dome was completely blown up. A group of armed militants planted explosive devices under the dome and blew it up because they considered it a sign of infidelity and atheism.

■ **In her testimony concerning the incident, Lina Mohammed Sultan al-Sabai' (17 years old), a resident of the area, said:**

“In the middle of that night, we heard the sound of a loud explosion that shook the village. We went up to the roof of the house and saw a pyre of fire flying in the air. It looked like ember, and there were men chanting: Allah Akbar (Allah is great) and Li Allah Al Hamad (Praise be to Allah)... No one dared to come out to see what was happening. In the morning, many residents from the village and neighboring villages gathered to see the dome and what happened to it and to its annex. People were divided between supporters and opponents of such acts, especially as the dome was considered a religious “landmark” that had nothing to do with the conflict that took place in the village.”

As for the impact of the incident, she said: “After the dome was blown up, a state of terror prevailed among the residents of the village, in addition to the feeling that the one of the most important monuments in the area, which generates income for them from the influx of visitors and foreign tourists, has completely disappeared. This incident also aggravated the hatred between the residents of the village and the district that were divided by recent events<sup>(113)</sup>.”

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(113) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Lina Al Sabai', May 11th, 2017.

# Aden

After the war erupted in Aden in early March 2015, following the invasion of the city of Crater by the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) and the forces of their former ally Saleh, the group's fighters entered the church of St. Joseph and messed with its contents; they smashed statues and antiques, and wrote their slogans on the church's walls. Witnesses reported to Mwatana that a group of masked men believed to be al-Qaeda entered the church of St. Joseph after the withdrawal of the fighters of Ansar Allah (Houthis) and the forces

(114) <http://www.elganob.com/local-news/11983/%E2%80%98%E2%80%98%D9%83%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B3-%D8%B9%A7%D8%AF%D9%86%E2%80%98%E2%80%98-%D8%B5%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B3-%D8%B9-AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE-%D9%85%D8%BAF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%B1.html>



- **Reda Rashad Mohammed (50 years old) was an eyewitness to the burning of St. Joseph Church. Reda, a member of the local council, who lives next to the church, said:**

“On the morning of September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015, we were surprised by a group of masked gunmen riding in a Hilux car and two of them were on a motorcycle. The gunmen entered the church and set fire to it, which led to the burning of its roof and contents and the rest of the walls. The remaining items in the church, such as wood and icons, were stolen. The guard room, located behind the church, was also robbed. The guard had built it himself, after we decided to lodge him and his family behind the church, because their house was burned. They are a poor family and the state did not help them, so we lodged them behind the church wall after they built that room themselves<sup>(115)</sup>.”

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(115) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Reda Rashad, May 11th, 2016.

# Sheldon Church

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## Aden

The Sheldon Church or Hafoun Church was built in 1952 during the British invasion of Aden (1839 – 1967), in Hafoun Street in the Mualla District.

From March – July 2015, and during the battles in the city of Aden between the Ansar Allah group (Houthi) and the forces of their former ally Saleh on the one hand, and the Popular Resistance fighters in the city and the Arab coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE on the other hand, the Sheldon Church was subjected to attacks by the fighters of the group. After their withdrawal from the city, the church was also subjected to other attacks by al-Qaeda militants.

- **Moubarak, (a pseudonym), (20 years old) is one of the residents of the neighborhood where the church is located. He gave the following testimony about the attacks against the church:**

“Since the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) and Saleh forces entered the Hafoun area in mid-April 2015, they broke into the Sheldon church and destroyed all the statues there. They also searched for the Christians who lived in the church, but the neighbors hid them and protected them. Following the withdrawal of the Houthis and the forces of Saleh from Mualla in mid-July 2015, and after a month and a half, al-Qaeda gunmen came in and wanted to blow up the church, but the residents of the neighborhood confronted them. They succeeded only in destroying the cross, which was at the front of the building. In December of the same year, a group of extremists infiltrated the church building, and we were surprised to hear the sound of a powerful explosion without fire inside the church. The explosion destroyed the entire church furniture, the wooden ceiling fell, and the walls were slightly damaged. Now, the church has been closed by the people of the neighborhood, and it is abandoned<sup>(116)</sup>.”

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(116) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, May 10th, 2016.

# Al Husseini Mosque

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## Aden

The Al Husseini Mosque, or the Al Khawja Mosque, is one of the most famous and distinctive mosques in the city of Aden. Built at the beginning of the 20th century, it is located in Al Katee' Street in the Seera District.

Before the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) entered Crater in April 2015, there were suspicions circulating about the so-called Adenian Shiite Group, which prompted members of this group to travel suddenly. After the Ansar Allah group's (Houthis) control of Crater, they were stationed in several places, including the Al Husseini mosque or its surroundings. Nearly four months later, the forces of the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE targeted the mosque and hit it with a bomb that almost completely destroyed it, leaving it in ruins, with two domes in a bad

condition. When the rubble was removed, the remaining contents of the mosque were destroyed. However, the area was fenced off in order to convert the mosque into a mosque for Sunnis. A building belonging to the mosque, where the activities of the Shiites of Aden were held and which served as the headquarters of their group, was seized, because they were Shiites and accused of providing assistance to the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) during the war.



- **Abdul Kader Abdallah Al Mohdar (50 years old) is a historian, the head of the Center for Cultural Creativity in Aden and a resident of the neighborhood where the Al Hussein Mosque is located. Al Mohdar said the following in his testimony on the destruction of the mosque:**

“The mosque is 109 years old. During the onset of the war in the beginning of March 2015, the residents agreed to close the mosque. It remained closed even after the Houthis entered the area. At approximately 11:40 am, on Thursday, Ramadan 29<sup>th</sup>, the Saudi-led coalition forces bombed the mosque and almost completely destroyed it. Only two domes from the mosque remain. On Eid al-Fitr, a group of weak souls sold the mosque’s wood. Before November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015, a group of Sunnis lifted the rubble and debris of the mosque and fenced it off. The site of the mosque is now fenced off, and it has a plaque with the names of martyrs of the Sunni community. As for the Husseinieh, a hall of celebrations and events annexed to the mosque, it was converted into a mosque for the Sunnis. The upper floors of the building were designed to house families from the area whose homes were destroyed during the war. Some of the Shiite houses in Crater were also seized<sup>(117)</sup>.”

- **Ahmad, (a pseudonym), (46 years old) is one of the residents in the neighborhood where the mosque is located and he also gave his testimony about this incident:**

“When the Houthis invaded Aden, they were stationed in several places; in Al Katee’, in the central bank, in the Al-Khawja Mosque (Al Hussein), in the Al-Bayhani High School and in the Bazra’a Girls’ School. On Ramadan 29, the archaeological mosque was bombed and completely destroyed.<sup>(118)</sup>”

(117) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Abdul Kader Al Mohdar, May 15th, 2016.

(118) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, May 16th, 2016.

# AL Baynyan Temple or Hindu Temple

## Aden

to the temple and worship rituals. Before leaving, the gunmen placed a sticker on one of the walls, bearing the slogan “Ansar al-Sharia”, and allowed a group of citizens to enter the temple and loot the rest of its contents.

■ *AL Baynyan Temple/HINDU  
TEMPLE*  
*by: Alaa al-Sayd*

Built at the turn of the twentieth century, this Hindu temple, known as “Shree Hingraj Mataji Mandir” in the city of Aden, is located in a picturesque mountainous location in a large cave in the Khusaf Valley, in the Crater area of Aden. The Hindu community in Aden practiced its rituals and religious rituals every Friday evening. The day-to-day maintenance of the temple was done by the Indian Association in Aden<sup>(119)</sup>.

At the end of July 2015, a group of masked gunmen belonging to the Ansar al-Sharia group stormed the temple and destroyed its contents, including statues and other objects pertaining



(119) <http://eoisanaa.org/the-rich-hindu-temple-heritage-in-aden/>

■ **Yassri (65 years old) was an eyewitness to this incident and he gave the following testimony to Mwatana:**

“During the war, in May 2015, the Houthis entered and broke the locks of the temple to inspect it and make sure it didn’t contain any weapons. Then, they went out and did not return. After their withdrawal from Aden in July 2015, three vehicles with armed masked men stormed the temple and tampered with its contents; they broke the statue of the cow, other statues, offerings, some pictures and paintings. Then, they put a sticker with the slogan of al-Qaeda and the words “Ansar al-Sharia”. They also allowed some people to steal the rest of the food, cooking equipment, refrigerators and gas cylinders. Since then, no one has come. I have been guarding the temple here for thirty years and the temple falls under the authority of the Indian Embassy<sup>(120)</sup>.”

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(120) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, May 9th, 2016.





# **Chapter V**

## **Museums**



# Military Museum

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## Aden

The history of the military museum in Aden dates back to 1918. It was then a school for basic education - the basic stage in English (Residency School). On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1971, after the independence from the United Kingdom and the evacuation of the last English soldier in November 1967, it was turned into a Yemeni military heritage museum by virtue of a decree issued by the President of South Yemen at that time Salem Rubai Ali.

The museum's most prominent collections are comprised of ancient weapons and pictures of revolutionaries, exhibits on Yemen's military history and the recent development of the Yemeni

armed forces. It also contains photographs and historical artifacts made by man from stones.

The museum is located in a street bearing its name (Museum Street) in the Seera District. In April 2015, attempts by the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) to storm the city of Crater led to the shelling of the museum several times, which caused disproportionate damage to its walls. In May of that same year, the group's fighters stormed into Crater and were stationed in several important places, including the Military Museum. The Ansar Allah fighters (Houthis) broke the main gate of the museum and stayed inside it for several months, during which they looted some of the contents of the museum.

On July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the museum was subjected to an air strike carried out by the forces of the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The raid partially destroyed some of its walls, cracked the rest of the walls and parts of the ceiling and the upper floor collapsed. The Ansar Allah fighters (Houthis) then left the museum building in frenzy. The museum was then looted and robbed, with many contents, mostly old and precious weapons, lost.



■ *The Military Museum in the old city of Crater after the war – Aden  
by: Saleh Bahulais*

■ **Nasser Ahmad Kassem (57 years old)**

is one of the museum's neighbors and he gave his testimony to Mwatana about what happened to the museum during the war and the shape it's in. Nasser said: "When the Houthis first came to Crater, they invaded the military museum in the beginning of May 2015. They broke the museum's big main gate and stationed themselves inside the museum. They would bring out the fancy chairs and sit on them in the street in front of the museum. They robbed the museum of its pieces and also used it to provide food supplies. One day before the liberation of Crater, on approximately Ramadan 28<sup>th</sup> or July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the museum was bombed by a coalition air strike, which destroyed about 20% of it. After striking the museum, some thieves stole some of its contents, such as old weapons and other things. The museum's northern part is destroyed, including the roof. Some of its walls are destroyed, and the rest of its contents are still inside<sup>(121)</sup>."

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(121) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with Nasser Ahmad Kassem, May 12th, 2016.

# The National Museum of Archeology (Al-Oradi Castle)

## Taiz

The National Museum, or “Al-Oradi Castle”, is located in the Al-Oradi area, which is adjacent to Al-Jahmiliya neighborhood from the north in the Salh district. Imam Ahmad bin Yahya Hamidaddin (the last imam to rule Yemen) used this castle as the seat of his rule from 1948 to 1962. Although sources do not indicate the period during which the palace was built, some accounts date back its construction to the end of the rule of the Ottoman Empire in Yemen. However, it was completed in 1926 by the Emir of Taiz, Ali bin al-Wazir.

The castle was converted into a national museum of archeology and was officially opened in 1967. The museum contains artifacts and relics for Imam Ahmad and his family, as well as old weapons and commemorative photographs, mostly from his reign<sup>(122)</sup>.

With the beginning of the armed conflict in March 2015, the Ansar Allah group (Houthis) seized Taiz and used the museum to rest and to store weapons and ammunition. At 11 am on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the museum building was shelled during a clash between the group's fighters and the Popular Resistance fighters, who managed to impose their control. After the withdrawal of the Ansar Allah fighters (Houthis) from the building, they bombed it in response to the resistance fighters.

This mutual bombing resulted in the partial destruction of two rooms in the museum's third floor, in addition to moderate and mild damages in different parts of the museum. Mwatana was able to conduct a quick inspection of the damage to the building. However, the search team was unable to take any pictures of the incurred damage because of the tight security imposed on the site by the Abu Abbas Brigades and al-Qaeda militants, since at that time; the area was under the control of the popular resistance's mixed factions.

Some of the museum's contents was looted on the same day that the clashes took place. Mwatana became aware that gunmen from the Abu Abbas Brigades took three bags of silver coins and antiquities and three other bags of antique bronze items and the witness interviewed by Mwatana had reservations when discussing this issue.

(122) Source: The National Information Center.



## ■ Saad, (a pseudonym), (42 years old)

said that the looting happened the same day as the violent clashes that led to the withdrawal of the fighters of Ansar Allah (Houthis) from the building. He added: “The resistance fighters arrived to the fourth point (the population of Taiz had the habit of naming the Yemeni Swedish hospital as the fourth point, and the name stuck to this neighborhood) on Saturday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015. This was in the early hours of the morning, and the militants of the Houthis and Saleh were holed up in several locations, including the Al-Oradi Castle/National Museum of Archeology. They were using these locations as military sites to launch offenses against the city’s neighborhoods. After the Houthis lost their positions, they withdrew and stationed themselves in the Al Jahmiliya neighborhood, which is approximately 800 meters away from the Al-Oradi. Then, the arbitrary shelling began in an insane manner across the entire area. It was approximately 10 am and at 11 am, the Houthis bombed the museum building with two consecutive artillery shells, destroying two rooms in the third floor and severely damaging the building constructed from brick and wood. This was the first time the museum was shelled, which caused the cracking and destruction of most of its walls<sup>(123)</sup>.”

Saad stated: “The shelling and the clashes have damaged the buildings and shops surrounding the museum and have displaced people from their homes, which has made these homes and shops vulnerable to looting and the livelihoods of people and the movement in the area have completely ceased.”

Concerning the looting of museum’s contents and relics, Saad said: “After the resistance arrived in the area and took control of the site, we learned that the Abu Abbas Brigades took three medium-sized bags containing silver coins and antiquities, and three bags containing antique bronze items on the same day. This is what I learned, because it was secured by the legal office of the Abu Abbas Brigades, and the rest of the archaeological artifacts are now buried under the rubble in the museum, in the 2 destroyed rooms.” Then, he retracted and said: “That day, a general state of confusion prevailed because of the quick events that occurred and after these sites fell under the control of the resistance after the withdrawal of the Houthis. It was difficult to determine whether there were antiquities that were looted because of the overlap and acceleration of the events, and the high risk and danger due to the shelling, especially since the place has now been closed and access is denied because of the gravity of the situation there.”

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(123) Interview of Mwatana for Human Rights with an eyewitness, February 2nd, 2017.

## **Acknowledgement and Appreciation**

The Report “The Degradation of History” was prepared by the Research Unit of Mwatana Organization for Human Rights, under the supervision of the Executive and Senior Management, and with the cooperation of the other units and departments of the Organization, in addition to the participation of specialized experts.

Mawtana would love to express our gratitude and appreciation to PAX for Peace for their important and valuable input throughout the drafting of this report. Their advice and contribution were essential and always constructive

Mawtana wishes to express its gratitude to all the people who gave their testimonies and provided statements and data concerning the incidents documented in the present report. It would also like to thank the consultants who contributed with their comments and enriched the report during the period of its preparation and review.

If it weren't for all of them, this report would not have been published.



Mwatana for Human Rights

### **Mwatana for Human Rights:**

Mwatana is an independent Yemeni organization involved in defending human rights. In 2018, the Baldwin Award recognized our work. Human Rights First announced awarding the 2018 Roger N. Baldwin Medal of Liberty to Mwatana. In the same Year the 10th International Hrant Dink Award has been granted to Mwatana for informing the world about the status of human rights in Yemen and for struggling against the rights violations in the country

[www.mwatana.org](http://www.mwatana.org)

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# The Degradation of History

## Violations Committed by the Warring Parties against Yemen's Cultural Property

“The targeting of cultural property and monuments is one of the areas of agreement for all warring parties in Yemen. The destruction of historical monuments and artifacts and archeological and religious buildings is the main manifestation of the country's descent into the abyss of a war without a resolution; a war that has affected everything and has not spared the life and property of Yemenis, including their ancient past and their unifying culture. Similarly, the damages caused by the war even affected the collective memory of Yemenis that is represented by their historical heritage and unique construction style, which is evident in their imposing fortresses, castles and high towers, and their original decorations on the walls of their places of worship”



Mwatana for Human Rights

**.Document .Support .Influence**

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